THE saint in Color on NBC-TV Network-Sundays

THE saint MAGAZINE

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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

LESLIE CHARTERIS' THE saint
in A Brand New Book-Length Novel

THE GADGET LOVERS

Adapted from The Original T. V. Script

ALSO

HELEN McCLOY
MICHAEL INNES
EDWARD D. HOCH
CORNELL WOOLRICH.
LEIGHLA WHIPPER

The problem of air pollution has been getting considerable attention in the Press of late, and I suppose this is an occasion where we should apply the old soporific of "better late than never" for whatever comfort it may give us, though God knows this is late enough.

I have experienced the joys of smog from London to Los Angeles, and without omitting such insalubrious stopovers as New York in between. Having been lucky enough to be able to spend most of my time for many years in clean country or seaside airs, and having long ago given up private and personal pollution by tobacco smoke, my nose is much more sensitive to what it breathes than that of the average city dweller, who must become inured up to the point where his lungs begin to succumb to the contaminants which his nostrils have learned to ignore, and therefore I am more conscious of any atmospheric abominations that are inflicted on me. Yet even while avoiding the big cities as much as I reasonably can (for many different reasons) I have still been pursued far outside them by the same sources of air poisoning from which they suffer local concentrations, especially in Europe, where the high price of gasoline has caused a multiplication of diesel engines which now not only monopolize all heavy transport but are spreading down through taxis even to private cars. In a room on the Mediterranean, six floors up and separated only by the width of a boulevard from the sea, I was amazed to find, in one week, a greasy black film accumulated on the blades of an electric fan which I had installed. On a Swiss Alpine road, with no chance to pass, I was obliged in self-preservation to drop back a couple of miles behind a coach-bus whose exhaust was spewing out a black cloud so thick that, without the slightest exaggeration, it was impossible to see the borders of the road behind it.

What effective measures will ever be taken against this growing menace to the health, and eventually the lives, of every one of us, is a guess that can only be made pessimistically. And mainly for one most mystifying reason.

The most vocal, the most powerful, and the best organized obstructionists to any enforceable clean-up are the industries and interests which contribute the most pollution. Obviously; because preventive measures will cost a lot more money, and thereby reduce their profits. This is just understandable, if despicable, business selfishness. But, stop and think: the Ogsmay Manufacturing Corporation, or the great Muckalong Transport Company, are not disembodied transistorized engines. Their policies are governed by boards of directors. Presidents and Chairmen, human beings like us, who have to breathe the same air, and risk the same cancers and emphysemas, together with their own wives and children and any other loved ones.

And so, the stupefying riddle: Do even the most power-mad and money-mad, autocratic Mr. Ogsmays and Mr. Muckalongs think they are magically immune?

Yours Charles

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767

THE saint MAGAZINE

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Vol. 25, No. 3

The Gadget Lovers 3
A Complete Book Length Saint Novel adapted from the TV script of John Kruse by FLEMING LEE

Imperious Caesar 76
by MICHAEL INNES

Through a Glass, Darkly 80
by HELEN McCLOY

Death Comes to Chuchu Valente .. 106
by LEIGHLA WHIPPER

What's New in Crime 123
by STEFAN SANTESSON

The Oblong Room 125
by EDWARD D. HOCH

Anastasia? 135
by ISTVAN LEOCHY

Screen Test 136
by CORNELL WOOLRICH

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LESLIE CHARTERIS'

THE saint in

the gadget lovers

The First of A Series of Brand New Novels to Appear in Each Issue

Original teleplay by JOHN KRUSE

Adapted by FLEMING LEE

Photos in this story are taken from the NEW TV Series produced by I T C in color starting SUNDAY EVENING, MAY 21st on NBC-TV Network

Roger Moore, as the Saint, gives Mary Peach, who plays the feminine lead in THE GADGET LOVERS on TV, an evening out in Paris. **(See P. 47)**

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Foreword:

As our eldest and most faithful readers cannot fail to have noticed, 137 previous issues of this Magazine have just about exhausted the reservoir of Saint material suitable for reproduction within our limitations of length, in spite of all the additions I have myself been able to make to the Saga during the same period, even to the point where we have sometimes recently been reduced to reprinting our own reprints. Such are the effects of monthly publication on a writer who is too artistically conscientious, or naturally indolent, or both, to meet the demands of mass production.

Television, with its weekly schedules, is an even more rapacious monster, which in less than two years had gobbled up almost all the Saint stories suitable for one-hour projection. The only way the show could continue, for new and expanded seasons, was by bringing in a stable of other writers to create new stories at a pace to meet the voracious demands of the medium. To this, after many hesitations and misgivings, I eventually consented.

Many of the results, fulfilling my worst premonitions, were lamentable. Some were passable. And a few, to my pleasant surprise, were quite good.

Now, in turnabout, I propose to try the experiment of bringing the best of these "originals" back to our Magazine public in readable form. They are not, in any sense, a "ghosted" job, because I do not pretend to be the author. The story lines were approved by me in outline; the shooting scripts were vetted by me; and the novelized versions which you will read were personally revised by me; but the final product can only be regarded as an exercise in team work on the character which I created.

This first example, as the title credits faithfully show, is the composite offspring of the talents of John Kruse, easily the best TV scripter we have had on the show, and Fleming Lee, a promising young writer who has a story of his own in our next issue. *L. C.*

ORDINARILY THE SAINT concerned himself very little with rabbits, considering them—when he considered them at all—happy creatures hopping about fields, reputedly a plague to farmers, but cute subjects for greeting cards and Disney cartoons. He had not even devoted much thought to those bunnies of the nubile human kind who in recent years have established elegant burrows in cities all over the capitalist world.

Maybe it was the novel notion of bunnies in Berlin that brought Simon Templar to the unwonted but not unpleasant surroundings in which he found himself on a particular evening in late June. Three hours remained before the departure of his plane from Tempelhof. Why not sample the un-

doubtedly unique incongruities of the Berlin Bunny Club?

What Hefner had wrought, the world had bought—or, as in this case, borrowed. This was no franchised Playboy Club, but a free appropriation of some of their most publicized attractions, with local adaptations. Strange are the ways of the spread, and decline, of civilizations.

Ensconced comfortably at the dark bar, with long-limbed, bare-shouldered rabbits scurrying over the shadowy landscape, Simon had to admit that here, indeed, was something to stir the most cynical adventurer's sense of audacity: it was not just the female forms; invitingly outfitted as they were, they presented nothing particularly novel in the way of human anatomy. It was the idea of the thing—the magnificent impudence of the fact that this harem of lovely but purportedly untouchable hares should be dispensing American steaks, French wines, and voyeuristic enticements far out here on the eastern marches, within the very jaws of Asia, surrounded on every side by hundreds of miles of bleak collectivism.

But for all one could have known in the hermetic dimness of the West Berlin rabbit hutch, it might have been December outside instead of June, the remembered lights of the Kurfurstendamm might have been the neon of Manhattan, and the ugly concrete slabs of The Wall not many yards away might have been among the foothills of Rockefeller Center. Here inside, everything was all sweetness and dark—soft jazz, good whiskey, and mass produced, sanitized eroticism.

The synthetic aspects were repellent to the Saint, who now that he'd tried the experience could think of approximately eight hundred better ways to spend his rare spare moments than sitting at a bar visually absorbing standardized sexuality which had about as much impact to it as the identical squares of butter set out on the dining tables.

He drained his glass and had just pulled his money from his pocket when his attention was arrested by the approach of a most luxuriantly developed young lady whose display included things of much greater charm than the cellophane covered packets in the tray at her waist.

"*Zigaretten?*" she said. "May I you serve?"

Simon handed her a bill and accepted one of the packs. "You serve very nicely."

"Thank you, sir," she smiled, and moved away.

Such an ordinary event would not be worth recounting, except that it is with such seemingly insignificant encounters that a wait for a plane can turn into an adventure. If the cigarette bunny, in her mammary munificence, had not come along at just that moment, and if Simon had not turned to witness the oscillatory retreat of her pretty little bottom, made rabbit-like by a fascinating caudal appendage somewhat resembling an overgrown powder puff, he would not have noticed the iron-gray stocky man sitting alone at a table on the other side of the dance floor. Alone, at least, except for several bunnies who stood around laughing at some story he was telling.

Simon turned back to the bar and said almost absently to the white-jacketed young man behind it, "Another of the same, please."

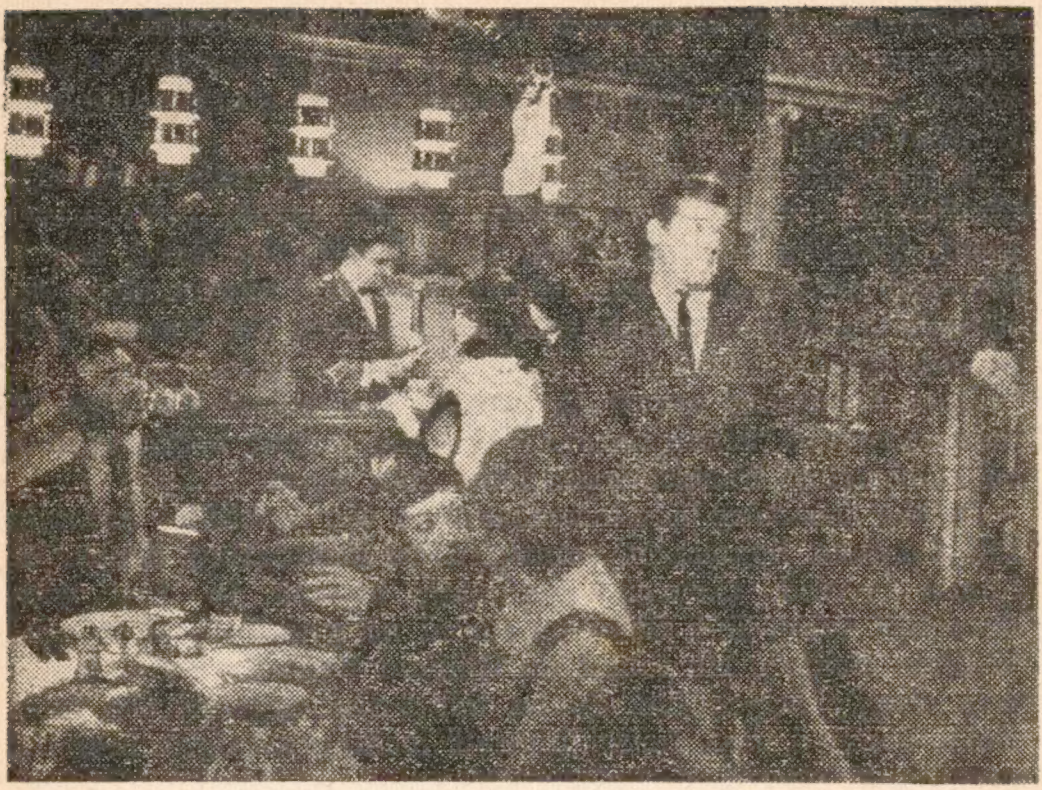
It took surprisingly few seconds for him to isolate from the mass of faces in his memory even so relatively obscure a figure as William Fenton, ex-Royal Navy, more recently with British Intelligence. Simon's previous contact with him had been brief but friendly, and now he had to decide whether he wanted to—or ought to—renew the acquaintnace. There was always the possibility that Fenton was involved incognito in some mission or other, and would not appreciate having his identity heralded all over bunny heaven.

"Here you are, sir."

The bartender was blond and pale-eyed, and more notable for friendly efficiency than for lively conversation, which suited Simon fine. But thanking him, he noticed a sudden change in the man's expression, a shift to new alertness. The gray eyes followed—as the Saint could see by glancing into the mirror-covered wall—the entrance and transit of a dark unattractive individual in a poorly cut suit.

The newcomer did what most newcomers to clubs do not do: having entered by the front door, he went more or less directly to the rear door, an obscure portal shrouded in black velvet, AUSGANG glowing above it, and disappeared behind the curtains.

Even a person less well versed in the ways of the Ungodly than Simon Templar would have felt some suspicion



In one swift, fluid movement, like the blurred attack of a hawk, the Saint leaped forward to save Fenton's life. (See page 8)

by now that all was not precisely as it should be in this modern Wonderland. The hasty newcomer was no White Rabbit, but he was most certainly intent on meeting some sort of deadline, and he was choosing a strange route by which to do it.

The Saint had already gone beyond suspicion to active calculation. The eyes of the bartender became his mirror. The Teutonic mixologist had become overly busy polishing glasses, but his narrowing gaze never left the velvet drapes of the exit.

When Simon whirled from his stool it was already almost too late. The dance had just ended, and the departing couples had opened a clear avenue from the exit door to William Fenton's table. Pushing slowly from between the black curtains was the blunt snout of a silencer.

Until that moment, the wine bunny had inadvertently shielded Fenton. Now she moved around his table to pour

champagne, and there was no time for the Saint to call out a warning. In that space of a precious breath or two which an ordinary man would have wasted staring helplessly, Simon acted.

A waitress was passing, carrying on her tray a gigantic platter of flaming shish kebab. In one swift, fluid movement, like the blurred attack of a hawk, the Saint leaped forward, snatched up one of the long steel spears, dripping blue flame, and hurled it unerringly across the whole width of the room.

Like a blazing arrow it pierced the velvet curtains. A man screamed. Simultaneously the champagne bottle exploded, showering Fenton with foam and glass.

In the ensuring pandemonium, as the would-be assassin fell forward hopelessly entangled in smoldering draperies, Simon moved through panicking masses to the wine drenched table. But there he found no gratefully uninjured William Fenton. He found no William Fenton at all—which was clearly impossible. So he lifted the edge of the table cloth, stooped, and found himself looking straight into the unblinking eye of an automatic.

It was natural that the Saint's fame as a modern buccaneer should have made him vividly remembered by most of those who had had even transient contact with him. William Fenton hesitated only for a split second.

"Simon Templar! Of all people to be rescued by."

The former naval officer crawled from under the table and put away his weapon.

"I assume it must have been you who put on the spear throwing exhibition."

"Who else?" drawled the Saint. "There's just one infection I couldn't save you from, even though you seemed in imminent danger of succumbing.

"What's that?" Fenton asked as they made their way past hysterically weeping bunnies to the fallen sniper.

"Tularemia."

"Tularemia?"

"Rabbit fever."

Three burly policemen had now arrived, and Simon remained at a discreet distance as they extracted the skewer from his victim's shoulder and the victim from the heavy

velvet curtains. Then one of the officers proceeded to haul the wounded man across the room toward what the manager said was the nearest private place: the business office.

The second cop stayed by the exit, while the third blockaded the main entrance, doubtless in an effort to maintain the status quo until the arrival of higher authorities.

The Saint and Fenton went along to the office, having already been implicated by witness, and when the policeman had deposited his groaning burden on the zebra skin sofa, he turned to them.

"*Nun bitte.* One of you is the gentleman who threw the shish kebab at this man?"

"Ridiculous though it sounds," Simon said in fluent German, "*Sie haben recht.* I did it."

At that point Fenton interceded, showing a card.

"I am with the British embassy, and this gentleman saved my life. The situation is more involved than I am free to tell you. I would very much appreciate it if you would call Herr Gratz of your Special Branch and request in my name, as you see here on the card, that he come to this club at once."

"*Jawohl, Herr Fenton.* But both of you gentlemen must remain here, please. No one is allowed to leave the building."

"Of course," Fenton said. "But would you ask these other people to leave the room? It seems improper. . ."

"Understood, Herr Fenton. Naturally."

A few moments later Simon and Fenton were alone with the sniper, who looked at them with understandable moodiness from beneath his weedy black hair.

"What is your name?" the Intelligence Officer snapped.

"Hahn."

"Tell us what this is all about. And quickly."

Hahn closed his eyes and compressed his lips. Fenton glanced around the room, which obviously had been gotten up to conform with certain magazine specifications of the ideal seduction chamber, even down to the drooling red and orange abstract painting over the fireplace.

Fenton took up a poker from the cold hearth.

"I'm not going to play around. Who is doing this, and why?"

Hahn opened his eyes, but did not answer.

"I'll use this on your shoulder. I'm not in the least squeamish."

Hahn shrank back and gasped, "Please. No. A man offers a job. I take it."

"What man?" Fenton asked.

"A man in a bar, no doubt," said the Saint, "whose face and name you can't remember."

"*Ja,*" Hahn agreed.

"Judging from your inexpert performance out there," Simon said, "I'm almost inclined to believe you."

"Their lot have killed thirteen Russian intelligence agents in four months," Fenton put in. "They're trained assassins, not casual labor."

Hahn turned his head away.

"I've put him on a skewer already," said the Saint good naturedly. "I'd have no compunctions about roasting him. After all, he's a Hahn, and pretty foul to boot."

"But let's pluck him first," Fenton put in, shamelessly continuing the pun. He grasped the man's lapels and pulled him wincing to his feet. "If you please, Simon."

A brief but expert frisk revealed only one thing of interest: a two way transistor radio about the size of a cigarette box.

"Standard Russian equipment," Fenton said, dropping Hahn back onto the sofa.

"Where'd you get it?" Simon asked.

"The man, he says when I finish the job I report back to him, with that."

"Where is he?"

"I do not know."

"Then report," Fenton said, taking the radio and shoving it into Hahn's hand. "Tell him I'm dead."

Hahn was hesitant.

"Go on," demanded Fenton.

"*Neun zu sieben. Neun zu sieben. Antworten Sie, bitte.*"

"Now if you'll excuse me for a second," Simon murmured, "I want to take a look through the door at a pal out here."

He had felt sure that the police would not let the bartender wander far, and he was right. Without even leaving the doorway of the office, he could see the blond man occupying himself intently with something just below the

counter. Behind Simon, Hahn was still intoning his numerical incantation.

"Neun zu sieben. Neun zu sieben."

But then, as the bartender continued his operations, the Saint heard a soft electronic whine in the office behind him, rising in pitch and volume like the sound of an irate mosquito. He spun around.

"Fenton, run!"

He could see Hahn, puzzled, holding the radio away from his ear. Fenton was already diving for cover.

"Throw it away, man," he was yelling. "Into the fireplace! Fast!"

Simon escaped the blast with an agile move which put him just outside the door. The explosion was small in range but noisy and very effective. It had turned the unfortunate Hahn into an abstraction with little more recognizable form than the painting which now sagged at a rakish angle over the mantlepiece.

William Fenton picked his way through the smoke and debris.

"At last I've actually seen it happen."

"Something you've been looking forward to?" asked the Saint. "And people say radio's lost its punch."

A policeman shoved his way through the newly gathered mob at the door and stared at the wreckage.

"We're all right," Fenton said. "But this man is not."

"I see," said the policeman, closing the door and hurrying to the body. "What happened?"

"When Herr Gratz comes he will explain."

"The bartender will already have escaped in the confusion, of course," Simon said. "But just in case, why don't you check on it?"

The policeman gave orders to a comrade as Fenton asked, "The bartender?"

"Yes. He seemed to be twiddling with some gadget over at the bar at just about the time Herr Hahn went up in smoke. Now if you'd explain the background of these fireworks. . ."

"It's part of a death campaign," Fenton said. "The organized assassination of intelligence agents."

"By radio? Sort of a variation on the singing commercial?"

Fenton's sense of humor was perhaps more limited than the Saint's.

"Not only radios," he went on. "Explosive gadgets in general. All Russian espionage equipment."

"But you said thirteen Russian agents had died. They knocking off their own men?"

"If I knew who was behind it, this might not have happened tonight."

Fenton stooped and picked up the remnants of the radio, a tangled lump of metal.

"This isn't a timed device. It had to be triggered. An impulse beamed from outside, probably from very short range."

"In this case from the bar, I'm sure. Shall we see if our friend left any traces there?"

Predictably, he had not.

"The bar man," Simon said to the cigarette bunny. "Where is he?"

"He left."

"What is his name?"

"Klaus. Hans Klaus."

"I would suggest that you put out a call for him," Fenton said to the nearest policeman. "All stations. The club will have his address. He certainly knows something about this."

"*Ja*, Herr Fenton. I have spoken with Herr Gratz. *Er kommt schnell.* And he says you are to be allowed complete freedom of action."

"Very good. When he arrives, tell him I and my friend will be at Dr. Mueller's laboratory. He knows where that is."

"Mueller. *Jawohl.*"

Simon became aware that his arm was in the beefy grip of William Fenton, and that he was being towed through the door toward the street.

"I have a plane to catch," he protested.

"You *did*," Fenton said.

—2—

The laboratory of Dr. Friedrich Mueller was on Wittelsbacherstrasse. It had every appearance of an exceptionally clean radio repair shop. Neatly disemboweled, pocket sized

cases of various shapes and colors spilled their glassy and silvery innards on the counter tops. Manuals the size of telephone directories lay open to esoteric diagrams, and the walls were lined with tools and coils of wire.

But Dr. Mueller, for all the atmosphere of his laboratory, was considerably more enthusiastic about his work than most repairmen of any species. A tall man with keen blue eyes and closely cropped brown hair, he greeted Fenton with a brisk handshake.

"Dr. Mueller," Fenton said, "this is Simon Templar."

The scientist's eyes enlarged with recognition as he extended his hand.

"*Ach*, the famous Saint. I am honored."

"Dr. Mueller works primarily with the West Berlin police," Fenton explained, "but in special cases he cooperates with us undercover people. And this is a special case."

Mueller turned serious and nodded.

"So," he said in careful, barely accented English, "you actually have seen one explode? *Wunderbar*. Our theories facts are becoming. And was it as we thought?"

"Exactly," said Fenton, "but more powerful."

"Yes. As it must be. We have ourselves not been idle. Except for the fact that we do not have the explosive, we have the reconstruction of the used-in-the-other-killings-devices managed."

"Show us, please," Fenton said.

Mueller picked up a small cigarette lighter from one of the tables.

"This. A little miracle. It will light cigarettes. . ."

He demonstrated the flame.

"Also will it pictures make. Nine of them. But on the tenth one, the last picture. . .boom! And the man who uses it is blown to pieces."

Simon took the small metal case and turned it in his fingers as Mueller pointed out the details of its operation.

"The ideal gift for touring friends who like to show their snapshots," Simon said. "Amazingly little thing to do much damage."

"But it does do much damage. The secret is a micro-explosive. Very small amount. Very powerful. We can only approximate it."

"Which explains our vital interest in the whole thing," Fenton said. "Aside from the politics, I mean."

"Have you seen one of these?" Mueller asked, picking up a briefcase.

"I assume it does something more interesting than contain papers," Simon said.

"Naturally," Mueller assured him with a broad smile. "And this. A signet ring."

He offered it to Simon, who politely declined.

"I'll leave such things to experts."

"Very sensible," said Mueller. He slipped the ring onto one of his fingers. "Wearing this, I may the briefcase quite freely handle. The ring neutralizes the proximity fuse in the lock. But not wearing it, the heat of my hand would activate the fuse, and up would go the whole thing, taking me with it."

"But with all apologies," the Saint put in, "isn't that approximately as new in espionage tactics as the old knife in the back?"

"Ah," said Mueller agreeably, "our friends, the unknown assassins, have a modification introduced. I will demonstrate. Gerda, please."

Gerda, the Saint decided on seeing her profuse bulk lumber into the room, was not the modification introduced, unless the opposition had descended to the use of lady wrestlers. But while she would have offered no serious competition to a Mata Hari, she was quite useful, apparently, as a pack mule, and probably impervious to explosions.

On Dr. Mueller's instructions, she donned the signet ring and carried the lethal briefcase into an adjoining room which was separated from the main laboratory by a steel door. Through a small, very thick viewing window, the three men watched Gerda place the briefcase on a table in the center of the bare-walled concrete chamber. She put the signet ring on top of the lock and left it there as she returned to Mueller's side, closing the heavy door behind her.

"So," the scientist said, "ordinarily the closeness of the ring to the fuse prevents any possible explosion. The unsuspecting spy goes happily along, little suspecting that anything can happen. Then, somewhere not far away, somebody one of these has."

He waved what appeared to be a small transistor radio.

"A transmitter with a range of a few hundred yards. It will the neutralizing effect of the ring neutralize. Cancel it. *Kaput.* You understand?"

"*Jawohl, Herr Doktor,*" Simon said.

Mueller switched on the transmitter, which began to emit an almost inaudible low pitched whine gradually ascending in pitch and volume, uncomfortably reminiscent of the sound effects immediately preceding Herr Hahn's messy demise.

There was, of course, an explosion, a good deal less powerful and more smoky than the one at the Bunny Club, but quite satisfactory. It left the table a heap of kindling.

The men withdrew from the window as Gerda went through the steel door to clear away the debris.

"Counterespionage *par excellence,*" the Saint said thoughtfully. "But if I understand, Russian secret agents are being killed by their own gadgets—and not through any efforts of your people?"

"Right," Fenton answered. "But they claim that we're responsible, of course."

"The next logical question is," Simon continued, "why *aren't* you responsible? I should think you'd be delighted to get rid of a few."

Fenton looked mildly shocked.

"My dear fellow, if we kill their agents, they kill ours. It just isn't done. Not except in the most extreme circumstances."

"I see. And you're afraid that these unexplained explosions are going to lead to a wholesale vendetta."

"Precisely. We know that Moscow is planning a revenge operation right now. One of the very very high-ups in their secret police is on his way to Berlin this minute."

"Not the mysterious Colonel Smolenko?"

Fenton looked at the Saint in surprise.

"How could you know?"

"Smolenko seems to reserve himself for pulling the cord after somebody else has cranked up the guillotine. I've followed the MGB system a bit—enough to know who'd be most likely to be handling what. Smolenko's one of those second-generation Commies with a genius for survival no matter how often the leadership gets shuffled. Must be a pretty effective fellow."

Fenton nodded glumly.

"And the more effective he is, the worse for our chaps."

"Obviously," Simon said to Meuller, "it's very important to know who makes the originals of these devices. They come from Russia?"

"*Nein.* They do not. On the outside, they could come from anywhere. On the inside—the miniaturization is too fine to be Russian. We believe Russian manufacture is absolutely out of the question."

"We must find out where it's from, if not Russia," Fenton put in, "and I don't mean next week. Smolenko passes through here in half an hour on the train to Paris."

"Know what I smell?" asked Simon thoughtfully. "Chop suey."

Mueller looked baffled.

"Please?"

Simon pulled up the corners of his eyes, oriental style.

"The original inventors of gunpowder. I think they must be tossing a few exploding fortune cookies in your midst. What could suit them better than to have your men and the Russians at one another's throats?"

"You make sense, my friend," Mueller said.

A telephone rang, and the scientist answered it.

"*Ja. Moment, bitte.* Herr Fenton—Herr Gratz is calling."

"Fenton here. Oh... I see. Well, keep at it, anyway. He has to be involved somehow."

"Klaus got away?" asked the Saint.

"Yes." Fenton said, putting down the phone. "They traced him from the club to the railway station and then lost him."

"Smolenko," the Saint said matter-of-factly.

Fenton's eyes flashed.

"My God, yes. And if Klaus is a trained killer—if he gets Smolenko...we're in for it!"

Simon nodded toward the phone.

"Better put this in the hands of the regular authorities, don't you think?"

"The police? But nobody knows Smolenko. He'll be traveling under another name, probably with an escort of red herrings. We've got only twenty minutes. Could the police spot Klaus just from your description?"

Simon started to speak, then didn't. He could picture his hopes of non-involvement lifting even now from the earth

of Free Berlin and winging their way west into the night with that plane he'd never catch.

"You're the only one of us who's had a good look at Klaus," Fenton continued. "There'll likely be two dozen blond men on that train somewhere near his age."

"Now, Bill. . ."

"Simon," the intelligence officer said crisply, "you've fifteen minutes to catch the Berlin-Paris Express. I'll stay behind here covering other eventualities."

"Like the champagne at the Bunny Club."

Fenton grinned.

"There are some things there that could stand closer scrutiny."

"While I'm getting scrutinized by Rasputin's successor."

"Come outside."

Somehow or other Fenton already had a cab waiting at the door with its flag down, and he smiled at Simon's reaction to his confident efficiency.

"I felt sure you'd choose the proper course," Fenton said.

The dash for the *Hauptbahnhof* was efficient, too. In spite of screeching turns and roaring spurts down the straightaways, no one was killed, and they arrived at the station just on time. Simon sprinted across the loading area and jumped aboard the Paris bound express just as it started to creak from its concrete slip.

But by that time any lingering nostalgia he might have felt for his earlier plans had been suppressed by the excitement that had begun to course through his blood. At the Bunny Club he'd been like an idling machine, cooling down between one strenuous trial and the next, but ready to move when the signal came. Now the signal had come, unexpectedly but unmistakably, and he was instantaneously coordinated, his senses keen, his nerves calm but alert, his whole body a magnificently operating unit.

The train was picking up speed, passing from under the huge canopy of the station's roof. The wheels rumbled smoothly underfoot, and the car swayed slightly. The few passengers who had been waving goodbye to friends from the corridor windows went into their compartments, and almost suddenly the entire population of the train seemed to settle into midnight somnolence.

Simon had, even in his haste, taken care to enter the train

at the dividing point between the second and third class sections of the train. The third class cars were at the rear, and there the unfortunate passengers would be nodding shoulder-to-shoulder on bare benches amid whimpering infants and greasy lunch bags. It seemed unlikely, however, that the guardians of the proletarian revolution would go quite that far to demonstrate their principles or even to achieve anonymity. The more luxuriantly upholstered and privately compartmented segments of the train were a much better bet. As for Klaus, he could be anywhere, assuming he was on the train at all, and he would most likely be surveying the same territory that Simon now proceeded to cover.

The Saint took on a sleepy, possibly somewhat alcoholic air, and wove his way along the corridor peering through the window of each compartment with the amiably confused expression of a man who'd forgotten the location of his seat. To the few people who were awake enough or alert enough to notice him, he gave an apologetic smile as he passed on.

His task was, of course, complicated by the fact that he had no idea of the appearance of the Russians for whom he was searching. He could only hope that his experience and instincts would serve him as well as they had on many former occasions.

He covered three second class cars and two first class cars with no success. The street lights of the Berlin suburbs had long since been left behind, the checkpoint into Eastern Germany had been negotiated. In place of the city's brightness there was the black rural landscape, marked here and there by the glow of a village or town, blending with the inner reflections of the corridor windows.

Then the opening of the door of the next car forward produced hefty odors of wine, cigars, cigarettes, and beer, along with subdued sounds of revelry. Simon had entered the refreshment lounge, where an exhausted and rumpled waiter was dispensing goodies to a troupe of plump insomniacs in various stages of hilarity, gravity, or asphyxiation from cigar smoke.

At the extreme opposite end of the car was a familiar face whose slate gray eyes were looking startled at Simon through the haze. Simon looked at the face. It belonged to Hans Klaus.

The Saint tried to shove his way through the lounge car before Klaus could lose himself somewhere up ahead, but it was a little like trying to run unhindered through the last three minutes of a football match. First the waiter blocked the aisle, and then an extraordinarily broadbacked man with a size twenty neck and a determined aversion to being pushed around.

By the time Simon arrived at the next car, a sleeper whose compartments had no windows facing the corridor, Klaus was just disappearing at the other end. In the next car, Simon hurried by two men who apparently, until the rapid passage of Klaus, had been resting their elbows on the lowered windows, enjoying the night air. They watched the Saint as he came to the end of his pursuit. The door at the end of the car was locked, and a sign in three languages told him: PASSENGERS FORBIDDEN: TRAIN CREW ONLY.

The little *toilette* to the Saint's left, which might have provided the last publicly available hiding place, was unlocked and empty. Simon looked back toward the two men who were observing him with sharp but controlled interest from their station halfway up the corridor. His main comfort at the moment was that if they were comrades of Klaus's they'd have been at his neck before this. There was no sign, in fact, that Klaus meant anything to them at all. On their faces—the one broad and red, the other somewhat triangular and pallid—was none of the overt alarm or amusement which might have been normally aroused by the scene they had just witnessed.

They offered no hints or comments. They just watched as if to see whether the so far harmless and mysterious little drama in which the Saint was involved might enlarge to include them—in which case their interest might become more active.

Their solemnity reminded Simon of the Secret Service men he had seen during appearances of American presidents—aloof, alert, and hair triggered. He even thought he detected a bulge beneath the broad-faced one's broad-lapeled unstylish jacket.

No lightning thought processes such as the Saint's were necessary to draw the essential conclusions. He had on his first quick trip down the corridor decided that these wake-

ful gentlemen were a very probable tipoff to the whereabouts of the fabled Colonel Smolenko. Neither of them possessed the aura of cleverness which would expectably emanate from the Colonel himself.

Simon sauntered back along the corridor. When he came abreast of the two sentinels, who made no pretense of not staring at him, he stopped all of a sudden and squinted out the window as if he had seen something startling.

That was sufficient to distract his travelling companions long enough for him to open the compartment door they were guarding, step inside, and instantly throw the bolt.

The Saint did not need to understand much Russian to disentangle the frightened word *torarisht* from the heavy pounding of fists on the door.

He turned to see his prize, and for once even Simon Templar was momentarily at a loss: Colonel Smolenko seemed to be a woman.

—3—

She looked at him coolly from her seat by the window: lovely Slavic cheekbones, fine lips devoid of make-up, and such large brown eyes that the fact she was pointing a pistol at Simon seemed entirely anticlimactic. If her dark hair had been less tightly pulled to the back of her head, and if she had worn something more fetching than a raincoat which probably had relatives among the nearest circus tents, she could have competed on all points with the distracting rabbits of the Berlin Bunny Club.

"Open the door," she said in English, gesturing with her automatic.

"I'm here to help you," said Simon. "Pardon me if I seem to gape, but I wasn't expecting a woman."

"Does it matter?"

"It could matter very much under certain circumstances."

"Keep your hands away from your body and turn and open the door."

Her English was strongly accented but clearly pronounced, and her determination that Simon should obey her more or less promptly or have his liver ventilated was just as clear.

He unlocked the door and immediately was in the ungentle hands of the Russian Secret Police.

"What you do here?" the big one asked, pinning the

Saint's arms behind him as the other despoiled his pockets of wallet, keys, and even small change.

Simon spoke to the beautiful Colonel.

"I've come to warn you that there's a man aboard this train who very likely intends to see you dead before you reach Paris."

"There are many men who intended to see me dead and ended up dead themselves," she said with cold arrogance.

"I don't doubt that in the least. My compliments."

Smolenko put down her pistol and lay aside the book which had fallen to her lap when her compartment was invaded. She took the passport which the smaller guard offered her from the Saint's jacket pocket.

"I think I do not need to look," she said, with the most frosty trace of a smile. "Simon Templar."

The Saint responded with a more friendly smile of his own. He bowed his head slightly.

"I'm flattered that news of my infamy has spread as far as the Kremlin."

"I have a photographic memory, and in our central office we have constantly updated files which inform us of the movements of any persons of interest who are in the area where I am going."

"It's nice to be of interest, Colonel."

The grip which the burly guard kept on Simon's arms was beginning to become irritatingly uncomfortable. The Saint knew a swift motion which would not only break the hold but send the holder to the hospital for a month, but that did not seem the best strategy for maintaining this temporary thaw in the Cold War.

"Do you mind if I stand up by myself?" he asked mildly. "As you can see, I have no weapons."

"Ivan," the Colonel said to the big guard, and continued in Russian.

Simon was freed, and he rubbed circulation back into his muscles. Ivan stationed himself at the door while his smaller, triangular faced colleague produced a pistol that somehow seemed much too big for him and kept it pointed at the Saint.

"You may not leave," Smolenko said. "No one is to know who I am."

"I have no desire to leave," responded Simon with exag-

gerated gallantry. "Such congenial company? Such heavy artillery? Besides, now there are enough of us for a rubber or two of bridge."

"Sit down," Smolenko said. "Before you are killed, we must talk a little. Ivan, go order some tea."

Ivan stared dubiously at his chief. Smolenko said something to him in Russian, and he shrugged and left the compartment. The other man took up the watch at the door. Simon was still standing.

"Now," Smolenko said. "Sit down. *Vis á vis.*"

"I prefer *tête à tête,*" said Simon, "but you're the hostess."

He sat down opposite her, crossed his legs, and relaxed. The comely colonel kept her eyes fixed on his face but showed no particularly urgent interest in anything he might have to reveal.

"You could have Raskolnikov there put away his hatchet," Simon said finally. "As I told you, I'm here for the sole purpose of saving your life."

"His name is Igor, and I give the orders, and I have no need of anyone to save my life."

"Apparently not, but don't you ever consider taking well-intended advice?"

"From bourgeois agents? Hardly."

Simon looked pained.

"Sticks and stones may break my bones. . ."

"I do not understand."

Obviously, she did not like not understanding.

"It's just a saying. You really speak English very well."

"Anything it is necessary to do should be done well."

"A very sound maxim."

Ivan returned, spoke in Russian to Smolenko, and then—with bear-like pride in his linguistic achievements—addressed Simon in English.

"Tea come."

"Excellent," said the Saint. "And well spoken."

Ivan's ruddy countenance softened a little.

"Thanks you."

"You're quite welcome."

The four rode in silence for what must have been a mile or two, and all the time Smolenko just looked at him. The first step in some Asiatic method of wearing him down?

Or was she searching the files of her photographic memory for information about him?

There was a soft knock at the door.

"Tea," said Ivan, and reached for the handle.

"Wait," Smolenko broke in. "We must give a tip, I think."

She thumbed through her book.

"Despicable bourgeois practice. In lieu of social justice you give measly alms."

"Measly alms," Simon repeated admiringly. "That's very good. But you must get over this thing about the bourgeoisie. They're really very clean, industrious people. Salt of the earth, and all that jazz. Tipping isn't their idea of fun—it's the proletariat that insists on it."

"The official recommendation is one Mark," the Colonel announced coldly.

She produced a coin purse, inspected both sides of a *Pfennig*, closely examined a big five Mark piece. Simon reached over and selected a silver Mark.

"There."

She flushed slightly, and Igor, who had started forward, relaxed.

"Now," she said.

Igor opened the door, and a white-coated waiter came in with the tray, bending quickly down to set it on a stand beside the door.

Simon was on him in an instant, one arm like a vise at his throat, the other twisting the man's wrist behind him.

"Meet Hans Klaus, bartender extraordinary," the Saint said through grimly clenched teeth. "Lock the door and search him. Hurry."

"For why?" cried a dumbfounded Ivan.

But the urgency in Simon's voice was unmistakable, and the Russian began to pat down the feebly struggling captive.

"Bartender?" Smolenko said, showing the closest thing to perturbation she had allowed herself since the Saint's arrival. "What is it you are doing?"

"Klaus is an unusual bartender. He's probably much more at home mixing Molotov cocktails than martinis."

Ivan's search produced a transmitter device exactly like that demonstrated so effectively by Dr. Mueller in his laboratory.

"Quickly," Simon said. "Check the tea...the tray...inside the pot."

Ivan obeyed despite his mystification, and within seconds discovered a small cone-shaped object which had been attached by suction under one edge of the tray. Suddenly Klaus darted out his hand and flipped the switch on the transmitter which Igor was holding. It began its now familiar thin crescendo.

"The window!" Simon yelled, twisting Klaus's arm until he yelped. "Throw it out. Fast."

Ivan slammed down the window and tossed out the little cone. Igor threw the transmitter. A second later there was an explosion which undoubtedly disturbed the dreams of a number of passengers about one car back.

"See what I mean about this fellow?" Simon said. "Dispenses good cheer wherever he goes."

Colonel Smolenko, who had been on her feet since the discovery of the bomb, stared at Klaus.

"He is the one you said would kill me?"

"*One* of the ones, probably." With his lean strength he evoked a new whimper from Klaus and said to him in German, "Now, tell us all you know, or I shall let these Russians tear you to pieces. Who are you working for?"

"A man...in Paris."

"His name?"

"*Ich weiss nicht.* I have him never seen. My orders come by telephone."

"What orders?"

"Hahn to kill. Then this train to catch and the occupants of this compartment to kill."

Simon released the erstwhile bartender, who rubbed his aching arm and took a deep breath.

"A nice night's work," said the Saint, turning to Smolenko. "Did you get all that?"

She nodded, and at the same moment Klaus grabbed the emergency stop cord. The train gave a tremendous lurch as the air brakes slammed on automatically. All those in the compartment except Klaus, who had prepared himself, went staggering off balance, and Smolenko fell back against the wall and slipped to the floor.

Klaus was out and running down the corridor. Igor and

Ivan plunged after him. Their silenced shots were lost in the groans and rattles of the halting train.

The Saint knelt over Smolenko, who was limp on the carpet, her eyes closed. He picked her up to put her on the seat, already assured that she was not more than stunned. Her eyelids fluttered, and she gave a sighing moan through parted lips.

"You look much more sweetly feminine asleep than awake, Colonel," Simon murmured.

She opened her eyes wide.

"Put me down. Instantly!"

He dropped her ungently onto the seat, flat on her back.

"As you say, Colonel."

She swung her legs around and stood up, jerking wrinkles out of her coat, trying to overcome dizziness with determined dignity.

"That was not good of you," she snapped.

"Picking you up or putting you down?"

"Neither. I need no help. You insult me."

"I'm not particularly flattered myself, Sonya. You couldn't have looked more horrified if you'd found yourself in the arms of King Kong himself."

"My name is not Sonya, and I do not understand all your idioms. Please. . ."

"Please what?" Simon asked politely, after she had hesitated for several seconds.

She was apparently unable to think of any useful orders to give him. He had proven his value and the sincerity of his desire not to see her killed. But there was no trust in her eyes, only a touch of confusion behind the hard glaze of the secret police officer. She was spared having to manufacture a statement by the return of her bodyguards.

"They shot him dead," she translated for the Saint. "They placed his body in the water of the ditch before the train was fully stopped, and they told that the signal of this rope was a mistake."

"Very clever," Simon said with disgust. "Why so quick with the guns? Klaus might have led us to the ringleaders of the whole plot."

"Whole plot?" asked Smolenko.

"The agents of yours who've been killed."

Smolenko looked surprised.

"Our secrecy is apparently not good. You and this Klaus have both found me here, who am supposed to be a cultural exchange representative, and now you know all about the murders of our. . ." . .

She stopped herself.

"But you tell me, Mr. Templar. What is your part in all this?"

"I would say, in the first place, that your remark about secrecy is the understatement of the century. You couldn't have a bigger following if you had hired P. T. Barnum as a publicity agent. Which leads me to believe, as they say in the old films, that this whole deal is an inside job."

"But what do you know, Mr. Templar? What facts do you have? What is your part in this?"

He told her, and she listened with more and more intense interest.

"So," he concluded, "these people—whoever they are—have managed to gain control of the production of your miniaturized equipment. You should know considerably more about that than I do. For instance, where do you get all those little toys like cigarette lighters that take pictures?"

"They are purchased in Western Europe by our Paris organization, which is absolutely trustworthy. You are lying. I am trying to think why."

The Saint gave a weary sigh.

"Okay. Believe what you like. I'm only trying to help. If you get yourself blown into pretty little pieces in Paris, don't expect any flowers on your grave from me." He stood up. "Charming as your company is, I'm tired, I didn't ask for this job in the first place, and if anything happens to you now, you can't claim it's my fault."

"Wrong," Igor said, speaking English for the first time. "We *are* blame you."

"No person in Paris know Colonel Smolenko," Ivan explained laboriously. "Not what she is looking like. . ."

"Or that she is woman," said Igor.

He prodded the Saint's shoulder with a long, skinny finger.

"Nobody know. . .but you. So if she dies, it will be through you. But she will not die."

Ivan looked cheerfully at the Saint and drew his broad peasant face closer.

"*You* will die."

"A fall from the train?" Igor asked.

"*Da.* I am think yes."

Smolenko's icy voice sliced Ivan's grin in half.

"Be silent, both of you."

She looked thoughtfully at the Saint.

"Of course we could never let you go. Now, you say Smolenko will be killed?"

"I do indeed, unless you take precautions, including some kind of cooperation with Western intelligence."

"Well, we will see if that is true, without cooperation of bourgeois spy apparatus. With your cooperation only. When we get to Paris in the morning..."

The Saint watched suspiciously as her lips pouted slightly in a smile.

"Yes?"

"We change places," she said. "I become your secretary, and you...you become Colonel Smolenko."

—4—

Simon Templar had seen Paris many times, and in many seasons, but never as a colonel of the Soviet Secret Police, and never in quite such precarious circumstances.

The hotel was not exactly of the class he would have chosen either, but apparently it impressed red travel agents as striking the proper tone between capitalistic extravagance and unbecoming shoddiness. His own taste ran to such palaces as the George V where he could treat himself to the level of luxury that he felt any self respecting buccaneer deserved, but he realized that Smolenko might have to conform to a more ascetic expense account.

Of all the more gracious hostelries he had frequented, however, he could not recall one that he had entered with such an entourage. In addition to a pair of bellboys, there were Igor and Ivan lumbering along the thinly carpeted hallway on either side of him like a movie gangster's bodyguards, and Simon's new secretary, the former Colonel Smolenko, looking decidedly mussed by the long train journey, but still more attractive than she had any right to be, considering her almost total disdain for the civilized amenities

which women ordinarily find indispensible for any sort of decent public appearance.

As the hotel employees opened the unimpressive suite, Igor and Ivan hurried inside and began inspecting the three bedrooms, the baths, and the closets. The porters went away looking surprised at the size of Simon's tip.

"Please," Ivan said, dragging two straight chairs to the center of the living room. "Down."

Colonel Smolenko sat in one of the chairs, half smiling at Simon's mystification.

"They want us out of the way while they search," she explained. "What you call, I think, standard operation procedure."

The Saint watched as the security agents pulled out drawers, looked behind pictures, peered and felt under table tops and rugs.

"Do a thorough job, boys," he said encouragingly. "From now on practically anything you touch could go bang."

"They are experts," Smolenko said frostily. "They need no advice."

"You forget, darling," Simon said, "*I* am in command now. I need no advice from a mere secretary, especially one who probably can't even take shorthand."

"Mr. Templar. . ."

"Colonel to you. You communists carry this equality business much too far."

Smolenko's lips tightened for a moment.

"You ask for trouble."

"I have trouble, and I didn't ask for it. As a matter of fact, it occurs to me that as long as we're the same person we may as well be friends. Any objection to that?"

Smolenko simmered for another few moments, breathed deeply, and shook her head.

"I'm glad you're so understanding," the Saint continued. "After all, I'm not a philanthropist in any ordinary sense of the word, but what I'm doing is entirely for your own good."

She gave an uncertain jerk of her head.

"You doubt me?" he asked. "You have good reason to. As a matter of fact I'd have been gone long before this if I could have managed to contact someone to pass the job on to."

"My men would have stopped you."

"Don't tempt me to take that as a dare."

There was an awkward silence. Simon stretched his long legs and yawned.

"I can't even think of anything I might be able to steal," he said gloomily.

"Naturally you would think in terms of the profit motive," Smolenko said.

He nodded agreeably.

"Of course. "

There was no sound for awhile but the pushings and pullings and probings of the security twins.

"Have you been in Paris before?" Simon asked, finally.

"No."

"You'll be out shopping for clothes, I imagine, while I'm tracking down the manufacturers of those noisy cigarette lighters."

"Why?"

"Well, women tend to associate Paris with fashions—and you surely can't be intending to go around *this* city in *that* coat."

She flushed and smoothed the rumpled material.

"In ordinary circumstances a man would not dare to speak to me in that manner."

"Would you send him to Siberia, or have him shot?"

"You think we are barbarians, don't you?"

"Not necessarily. I just think you have poor taste in clothes."

"Clothing I regard as necessary covering to maintain body temperature. That is its only use."

"Then I'd love to spend a couple of weeks with you on a South Sea island."

Igor was taking a vase of roses apart, looking inside each blossom. Finding nothing, he threw the whole bouquet out the window.

"Not a nature lover, your friend," the Saint commented.

"He is trained to distrust all manifestations of bourgeois sentimentality."

"Here we are back to your favorite subject again."

"All good, *polkovnik*," Igor said, pointedly addressing himself exclusively to Smolenko.

"Fine." Simon replied. "Now you boys may unpack your suitcases, and. . ."

There was a tap at the door. Simon smiled with anticipation.

"The champagne."

Smolenko looked horrified.

"Champagne?"

"I ordered it when we checked in."

Ivan and Igor dashed for the door and stood on either side of it. Ivan yanked it open. The startled waiter blinked, then stepped hesitantly inside. Simon indicated the most convenient table, where the waiter put down the ice bucket and glasses, rattling the crystal when he heard the door slammed and locked behind him.

"Voilà, m'sieu," he said nervously.

"Open it, please," the Saint said in French.

"Oui, m'sieu."

The waiter eased the cork toward release, looking more and more uneasy as the other occupants of the room moved several yards away from him.

"If you please, *m'sieu*, is something wrong?"

"We shall see," said Simon. "Open the bottle."

At the pop of the cork everyone in the room except the Saint, who had long ago learned to control such easily anticipated reflexes, gave an undignified jump. The waiter's forehead was glistening with perspiration. He splashed a little of the Bollinger into a glass and offered it to the Saint. The Saint offered it to Smolenko, who gestured toward Ivan, who yielded to Igor. Simon handed the glass to the waiter.

"You taste it."

"Moi, m'sieu?" the man asked, astounded.

"Oui. Vous."

"Merci, m'sieu."

The waiter took a sip and managed a sickly smile.

"All of it," said Simon, touching the base of the glass with a fingertip.

The waiter drained it, then stood trying to preserve some semblance of nonchalance as four pairs of eyes studied his every twitch.

"That is all," the Saint told him at last. "You may go now."

When Ivan opened the door, the waiter hurried out with

relief. Simon filled the glasses as Igor gave the tray and the bottom of the bottle a close inspection.

"Cheers."

Smolenko raised her glass grudgingly.

"This is generous of you."

"You're very kind, but I'm not paying for it."

"Who is?"

"The Kremlin, of course. We're on an expense account, aren't we?"

Smolenko glared at him.

"Your file is quite correct. You are nothing but a mercenary adventurer."

"And one who likes staying alive. While we're dawdling merrily here, evil wheels are turning in this city. Your rather spectacularly defective electronic equipment is purchased from Paris. Klaus said he was hired here, by a man who knew the number of your compartment. If they were confident enough not to be watching the train when it arrived, they'll be suspicious when Klaus fails to report—so all in all our best course is to trace them before they trace us."

"I am ahead of you," Smolenko said. "Someone will be here soon."

"Who?"

"One of our best people. And now I take a shower and change clothes."

"Remember, we're not in Moscow. You won't need much to maintain your body temperature."

The desk called twenty minutes later, and Igor said *da*, hung up, called to Smolenko in Russian, and said to the Saint, who emerged from his bedroom straightening his tie: "Blagot here."

Smolenko came from her room and joined them, wearing a most plainly cut brown dress and cumbersomely heeled shoes which in the western nations would rarely have been inflicted on any woman under sixty-five.

"I must admit," Simon said, "that for a female with the whole sartorial deck stacked against her, you manage to look amazingly beautiful."

"I suggest you stay in your room," she said.

"I suggest that as Colonel Smolenko, I'd better be here to greet our trusted friend. And I also suggest that you fill me in on who he is."

"He is Blagot, a member of our Paris apparatus. I shall let him know who I am. We need no masquerade for him."

"You've met him?"

"No. Nobody here has seen me."

"Your naivete is most affecting. Weren't you listening to what I said a few minutes ago? Your assassination was planned by someone who knew your entire programme. The higher a man is in your organization the more possible it is that he could be behind the whole thing. Now if you seriously want to relieve me of my starring role in this farce, I'll slip quietly away down the fire escape and leave you to your fate."

There was a respectfully soft rap at the door.

"Stay," Smolenko said to the Saint.

"Then let me handle this. Ivan, open the door."

Ivan hesitated, looking toward Smolenko for confirmation. She nodded, and the bodyguard released the latch.

"Come in," Simon said in French.

A rather short thick man, reminiscent of a greasy sausage in a black suit, entered the room and looked obsequiously and searchingly from face to face. But his personal appearance and mannerisms were completely overshadowed for the Saint by the adornment and contents of his right hand. The signet ring he wore, and the briefcase he carried, could have been identical twins of those Simon had seen exploded in Dr. Mueller's laboratory.

The mere fact that he had the items with him was no proof of murderous intentions. The ring and briefcase were standard equipment. Colonel Smolenko of all people would be aware of that. The teaser was in the question whether or not there was some as yet unknown but highly interested party lurking somewhere within a few hundred yards ready to send a signal which would override the neutralizing power of the ring and blast Suite 502 to kingdom come.

"Colonel Smolenko?" the newcomer asked.

"Comrade Blagot," said Simon.

Blagot threw his fist up in the communist salute.

"On behalf of us all, welcome, comrade."

"Thank you," the Saint responded, pretending a slight difficulty with French pronunciation which ordinarily did not mar his fluent use of the tongue. "My secretary, Comrade Malakov. Our security men. . ."

Blagot made his obeisances to each.

"And now," Simon continued, "how goes it?"

"The situation grows worse by the hour, Colonel. Another of our men died yesterday—in Liverpool, England."

"An explosion?"

"Yes. But the cause. . ."

Blagot shrugged and distended his thick lips.

"I do not consider that an adequate answer," Simon snapped with sudden harshness.

"Defective equipment, perhaps. . ." began Blagot.

The Saint moved threateningly toward him.

"If that remark is meant seriously, it indicates that the most defective equipment is in your brain, my friend."

Blagot backed away a few paces, looking openly frightened.

"Some have talked of defective equipment, comrade, but I do not believe it. Naturally, the answer must be that British or American agents are planting bombs in the luggage of our people. That much is clear already."

"One thing is clear to me already," the Saint said, "and that is that the handling of this affair by your department borders on total incompetence. For example, if you had even the smallest grasp of the true situation you would not have brought one of those briefcases here."

"But Colonel Smolenko, I have made certain that it is empty of any harmful devices."

"It contains its own explosive charge, does it not?"

"Naturally, but the ring. . ."

"The ring is useless against the saboteurs," Simon said. "Give that to me."

Blagot set down the leather case and pulled off the ring, which the Saint put on his own finger. Then Simon took the briefcase to a table by the window and worked over it for a moment with a letter opener.

"What are you doing?" Smolenko demanded harshly, and then in reaction to Blagot's astonished stare she moderated her tone and asked with much more respect, "Do you need help, Colonel? You frighten us."

"I have finished already," Simon said. "I have simply broken the connection between the firing device and the explosive. Now we can speak without fear of violent interruption."

He turned suddenly on Blagot, peering at him with intense eyes that were all blue ice.

"Comrade, tell me. Who in our organization knew the details of my trip to Paris?"

"Me. And of course Claude Molière."

"Ah, yes. I have read his file. Nobody else?"

"Naturally not, Colonel. Your orders were that we maintain top security."

"Which was not maintained."

"It is unpardonable, Colonel, but. . ."

Blagot gave another of his shrugs and protruded his lips. Simon felt a desire to step on him as he would a cockroach. His moment of bloody fantasy was interrupted, however, by a thin, high-pitched sound—a sound he had expected as surely as he would have expected day to follow dawn.

"Here," he said quickly, pointing to the table on which the briefcase lay.

They gathered around, all but Simon staring, perplexed. The faint little whine grew higher and louder until its pitch almost rose above human hearing. Then the room was abruptly silent.

"At that moment when the sound stopped," the Saint explained, "we would all have been blown into small pieces."

He watched with satisfaction as the effect of his somewhat exaggerated description of the explosive's power registered on the semicircle of faces. Then he went on to explain the means by which such devastating effects were achieved.

Comrade Blagot mopped his oily brow with an unclean handkerchief.

"But it is impossible that anyone could have tampered with this case. I received it only today from our supplier."

"No one needed to tamper with it," the Saint said firmly. "The radio signal receiver was built into it. And the same with the lighter-cameras and the minature communications equipment. Now I think I shall pay a call on your supplier."

"But the purchaser is a reliable man. I cannot believe that Molière. . ."

"Where is this Molière?" asked Simon.

"But, Colonel, you said you had read his file."

"I read many files."

"But Claude Molière is Assistant Controller for the whole *departement.*"

"Imbecile! I mean where is he now, at this very moment?"

Blagot was properly abashed.

"I am sorry, my Colonel. I believe he should be at his shop. Let me telephone to make sure."

"No. I should prefer to pay him a visit unannounced. And if I were you I would not be so quick to defend him. He may be a simple dupe, like yourself. On the other hand it is possible that he was standing somewhere down on the street broadcasting the request that this bomb blast us to our deaths."

Blagot gulped.

"So now," Simon announced, "you will take us to your friend, Moliere. If you please."

—5—

"Oh, brave old world, that hath such creatures in it."

Such was Simon Templar's reflection on his first view of Moliere *Musique à Go-Go.* The small narrow shop was a churning three-dimensional kaleidoscope of squirming and twitching teenagers in boots, lavishly bell-bottomed trousers, miniskirts, yellow checked jackets, and Edwardian neckwear. Like victims of tarantism, they could not rest even in a place which was not meant for dancing but for the sale of phonograph records. The savage sounds which moved them issued from three auditioning booths in the rear of the store, each screaming out the agony of a different disk. On the walls hung electric guitars, bongos, radios, and television sets. A couple of exhausted female clerks had apparently long ago given up trying to keep any kind of order, and contented themselves with watching the door in an effort to keep anybody from stealing anything.

Blagot shoved his way through the jerking crowd toward an office which looked out on the rest of the shop through a large window. Simon took Smolenko's hand to pull her up ahead of him when it appeared they would be separated in the crush. It was a surprisingly soft, warm hand, but it abruptly denied him the pleasure of any prolonged contact.

Ivan was so fascinated with the miniskirts that Igor had to be sent back to fetch him through the mob.

"Colonel Smolenko," Blagot said to Simon, ushering him into the little office, "allow me to present Comrade Claude Molière."

If Molière had believed that the Smolenko party had been recently dispatched by a radio-controlled bomb, he did not betray the fact. Unfortunately, it was most likely that he would have been aware of the failure by now in any case. He was a birdlike man of about thirty five, with a hooked beak and glittering black eyes, and his twittering nervousness seemed more a permanent characteristic than the result of a surprise confrontation.

"Colonel, Colonel," he said, jumping to his feet and extending a moist, delicate hand, "what a pleasure. What an honor."

The Saint shook the hand coolly.

"My secretary, Comrade Malakov."

"Comrade."

"Comrade," said the real Smolenko without enthusiasm.

Simon motioned her to one of the wooden chairs.

"My men will remain outside," he said with a wry smile, "keeping an eye on the quaint diversions of your country."

"My apologies, Colonel. At least in here the sound is not deafening."

"It does not matter. I am a man of few words and good hearing. I am sure you have many more interesting things to tell me than I could possibly tell you."

Molière almost visibly squirmed before the threatening steel points of the Saint's eyes.

"Ah, Colonel, no," he protested deprecatingly, looking as if he would have liked to change the subject entirely.

Simon was kind enough to help him. Glancing around the room, his eyes had settled on a bottle of a curiously spiraled shape which stood on a shelf between piles of catalogues.

"*Grand Abrouillac*," Molière said observantly. "A most distinguished liqueur which may be new to you."

"I know of it," said Simon, studying the label. "It does not travel. I was not aware that it was ever exported from Switzerland."

"You are a connoisseur," Molière said with approval. "A business friend supplies me. Damaged though it may be from

its trip down the Alps, you may be surprised at its quality. May I pour you a glass? And your charming secretary, of course."

"Thank you, no. We have just had champagne at our hotel."

"Ah, Colonel," Molière gushed, winking, "champagne. You know how to live."

"I try," said the Saint. "It seems to be increasingly difficult these days."

Molière, feeling the pressure applied once more, shriveled a bit. His laugh was weak.

"And now," Simon said brusquely, "to business. In Moscow we were struck—I might almost say shattered—by the excellence of your miniaturized equipment. Do you make it youself?"

Molière hesitated, almost stammered.

"Uh. . .no."

"Who does?"

"Ah. . .the firm of Grossmeyer, Cardin et Fils. Of Zürich."

"Zürich. Good."

Simon turned to Smolenko.

"Malakov, what was that thing we liked so much but had a little difficulty with—the lighter or the. . ."

"The lighter that takes pictures?" Molière interrupted. "A charming toy. It has given you difficulties?"

"One could hardly call them difficulties."

Simon waited to see whether his ambiguous statement would bring additional sweat to the shop owner's brow. It did. Then he went on:

"A tendency to jam temporarily after several exposures. These things are not my field. They are handled on a lower level. But as long as I am here I thought. . ."

"Colonel, I am sure the difficulties of which you speak must have involved only a single defective item or so. Our tests. . ."

"We cannot afford even one defective item. I trust you will see to the prevention of such oversights from now on."

"Certainly, Colonel. Absolutely."

"May I please have one of the photographic lighters?" the Saint asked.

"Now?" asked Molière with surprise.

"Yes. Now. If you please."

"But of course," Molière said with a notable mixture of facial expressions. "One moment."

He reached into one of the drawers of his desk and fumbled about as Simon turned and watched the display of rocking bodies which crammed the outer room. The Saint's mind was running in top gear, and his every move was calculated.

"Here, Colonel. With my compliments."

"Thank you," Simon said, taking the little burnished steel rectangle. "Is it ready for use?"

"Oh, yes. It is loaded. Ten exposures. You can make a record of your travels."

"And also test the possibility of faults in the mechanism."

"Certainly."

The Saint aimed the camera at Molière and pressed the tiny spring button in the hinge of the lid. Molière fidgeted and laughed.

"But, Colonel, is it wise? Photographs of me and my shop in your camera?"

"I shall not lose it."

He took a picture of Smolenko, then he turned in his chair and made two shots of the dancing crowd beyond the window. He turned back and clicked the device again in Molière's direction. Molière blanched.

"The light here is poor," he said.

"An espionage camera which will not make photographs in ordinary room light?" Simon asked incredulously. "That would be inexcusable. Let us try it out here."

Molière looked relieved until he discovered that "out there" meant the main room of his shop. Simon snapped Blagot, who seemed to have no fear of the camera and was obviously quite happy to let his comrade, Molière, remain the center of the testy Colonel Smolenko's attention. The genuine Smolenko appeared bored and vaguely disgusted at the inexplicable antics of her impersonator.

"Anti-capitalist propaganda," said Simon cheerfully, taking a frame of the dancers. "*Fantastique.*"

"I have some other equipment to show you," offered Molière nervously. "Very interesting."

"Not as interesting as this bizarre spectacle, surely. Just one moment. When I have finished the roll."

Turning for his next shot, the Saint muttered to Igor

in English, pusing him firmly in the direction of the back of the shop.

"Watch that door. Stop Molière if he tries to get away."

The choreomaniacs were reaching heights of rhythmic abandon rarely seen north of Nigeria. It was quite understandable that a travelling Russian should want to preserve a few images of such exotic native customs with which to regale the folks back home. But Comrade Molière did not seem to sympathize with the desire. His dislike of the whole business became more and more obvious as Simon counted off his photographs.

"Almost finished now. Eight. . .nine. . ."

The Saint did not exactly see Molière run for the rear of the shop. Like a startled bird, the terrified man was halfway out of sight before anyone saw him move. Simon watched with calm approval, locking the shutter mechanism of the camera.

"What is happening?" Smolenko asked. "This has gone far enough. You play with us."

"Apparently our comrade doesn't feel like playing. But don't worry. He won't get away. Igor's covering the back entrance."

Smolenko looked with a puzzled expression over the Saint's shoulder.

"Igor?"

Simon turned. Igor was standing there, beaming complacently.

"Igor covering *you*, comrade. Not so stupid as you think."

"You pinheaded baboon—he's getting away!"

The Saint shoved the man aside and raced toward the back door.

"Halt!" Igor cried, going for his pistol.

Smolenko's hand darted toward the guard's wrist, but Simon had already halted. Molière was bouncing out of sight down the alley in an old Renault. The Saint turned on Igor.

"Get Ivan to help you, and catch that man. I don't care if it takes you the rest of your life. . .find Molière!"

"I demand to know what is going on," Smolenko said.

"Okay, I'll show you. Watch."

Simon brought out the lighter.

"You see, this has a delayed action adjustment on it.

You can press the shutter release button and the shutter won't actually open for ten seconds. I'll set it on delayed action. I've taken nine pictures. This will be the tenth and last."

He walked several yards along the alley to a waist high garbage pail. Setting the delayed action switch and pressing the shutter button he dropped the miniature camera into the metal pail and came quickly away.

"Stay over here, now, and in just about three seconds. . ."

There was a loud, muffled boom, and the walls of the pail bulged fatly outward as the lid took off for housetop level. The Saint's and Smolenko's eyes, along with Igor's and Ivan's, followed the trajectory of the metal disk until it clattered back to the cobblestones of the alley.

"There but for the grace of God go I," Simon said soberly.

"Igor," Smolenko said, her eyes full of fire, her voice like a saber blade slashing air, "go and find that man."

She slipped into Russian, but it was clear from her tone if nothing else that Comrade Molière could not look forward to a very happy life in the near future, and that that future might not be very extensive.

Smolenko confronted the Saint as Ivan and Igor pounded away on the double.

"Now," she said. "How do you know this?"

She jerked her head toward the bulging garbage can. Her voice was dangerous, but the Saint was not easily awed.

"I saw the device demonstrated in Berlin, by a gentleman working with Western intelligence: A lighter exactly like that one, exploding on the tenth frame."

"So," she said, "it *is* your people behind this."

"No. They were merely trying to understand the workings of your equipment—the equipment, I mean, which has developed such a nasty habit of blowing up in your agents' faces of late. I already explained to you on the train about the British fear of pointless bloodshed among their agents and yours."

"Very humane. And I am supposed to believe your stories?"

"How many times do I have to save your life before you begin to have a little faith in me?"

"Faith is stupidity."

"I think it would also be slightly stupid to wait here un-

til some cop who heard the explosion comes looking for what made it."

She looked at him as he hurried her away from the music shop. When she finally spoke again, her voice was more subdued.

"I thank you. For saving my life."

"I suppose you're welcome. I haven't decided yet."

They continued on for several minutes through a tangle of back streets.

"I'll say one thing for you," Simon remarked. "You're probably the first woman I've ever met who can keep up with my pace when I'm evading the law."

"I walk three miles every morning."

"If you'd like to compete," Simon said, "we could try wrestling."

Smolenko smiled, and it was the first time the Saint had seen in her expression the vestiges of the child which linger in the faces of most really beautiful women.

"I might injure you," she said.

"I shudder to think what I might do to you."

She looked away and slowed her steps as they passed the display window of a *parfumerie.*

"These goods are very expensive, I suppose," she said with elaborate casualness.

"I'm surprised you'd notice."

"Mr. Templar, your insinuations to the contrary, I am not quite a total automaton. I notice the colors of fabrics. I enjoy nice smells. If I were a man I should use shaving lotions, which are pleasant and effective. Since I am a woman I use perfume, on some suitable occasions, and I wear dresses and often stockings. I even have experienced a love life, it may astonish you to learn. We have no need of false inhibitions in the socialist state."

"And you accept that some love life is necessary for the procreation of the race."

"Of course, but. . ." She broke off abruptly. "This is a ridiculous conversation. Are we going to the hotel by this route?"

"Eventually. For the moment we're probably safer wandering around here than sitting back at the hotel."

"Safer?" she asked. "But certainly Molière will not think

of trying to harm us now that we know about him. He will be too busy trying to save himself."

"Colonel, I'm surprised at you. Do you seriously think that Molière is the root of the problem, or even the most important part of it? He was much too easy a nut to crack. He gave himself away almost from the instant we walked into that shop. He was inept and practically shaking with fear when the scheme he'd been taking part in at a comfortable distance moved onto his own doorstep. He's only a piece of the puzzle."

"Igor and Ivan will find him—and see that he talks."

"Before that, he may talk to his own associates, and they will reorganize to have another go at us. Probably they have something in the works already, since they know they flunked out on the train. In the meantime, we may as well amuse ourselves. The shops will still be open for another couple of hours, and I need to do a little shopping. I didn't have time to pack a bag before I caught that train in Berlin."

"We shall part here then," Smolenko said.

"For safety's sake, let's meet at this spot in two hours and go back to the hotel together. Then I shall have the privilege, I hope, of taking the most beautiful colonel in the world out for one of the most beautiful dinners in the world. Assuming we don't get our heads blown off over cocktails."

—6—

"There is no such company as Grossmeyer, Cardin et Fils," said Simon, "in Zürich or anywhere near it."

They had just come back to the suite. The golden light of a setting sun fell directly through the windows, giving a touch of splendor to the otherwise uninspiring rooms.

"So that is why you went to the telegraph office and looked at the directories," Smolenko said.

His blue eyes opened wide and mocking.

"Do you actually admit that you were following me?"

She smiled.

"Why, of course."

"I somehow sensed those lovely brown eyes on the back of my neck," Simon said calmly, "but I figured you were

safer toddling along after me than getting yourself lost in the big, bad city. Didn't I lose you right after the wineshop?"

"Yes, but I picked up your trail again as you came from the clothing store."

"Which one? The men's or the women's?"

"The men's," Smolenko said matter-of-factly. "Why would you go to a store for women?"

She hesitated, momentarily flustered as he simply looked at her tolerantly.

"Of course," she said. "Presents for some friend. But that is not my affair. I am glad I discovered nothing that would make it necessary for me to consider you my enemy. I must admit that I am now inclined to trust you, for the present, and to believe that other elements must have somehow infiltrated my own organization."

"Brilliant, Colonel. Better late than never. Incidentally, what *is* your name?"

"You know it."

"Don't tell me you have only one. In Russian novels they always have five or six at the very least, and they get called something different on every page."

She smiled, and again there was that reflection of inner warmth and irrepressible youth the Saint had noticed on the street that afternoon.

"It's Tanya," she said. "Very common. Very easy."

She was standing by one of the tables, and Simon stepped toward her.

"But there's nothing common about you, *tovarisht*," he said softly.

She took a step backward, turned, and moved to the door of her room. For him the retreat was a form of flattery. If she had been uninterested—as women never seemed to be in a man so almost impossibly handsome as Simon Templar—she would most likely have stood her ground to freeze him off.

"I take a bath now," she said. "It is very warm here, after Moscow."

"Please don't consider my bourgeois sensitivities, any time you feel like undressing accordingly. As you were saying. . ."

A knock at the door interrupted him, and in an instant his hand was on the lock.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"Packages for you, *m'sieu.*"

Simon's sensitive ears recognized the voice of one of the *chasseurs* who had brought them to the suite earlier in the day. The man came into the room, both arms supporting a heap of parcels retained by his chin. The Saint sorted through the pile as Tanya watched from the door of her room and the bellhop went happily away with his *pourboire.*

"You are most generous with my expense account," Tanya said caustically.

"Don't talk like a capitalist, Comrade Colonel. I paid for these things personally."

He turned toward her, holding a large flat box wrapped in white paper and tied with red ribbon.

"Here. A little something for you."

For a presumably hardboiled survivor of Soviet political shuffles, Colonel Smolenko blushed somewhat easily. She was openly astonished, and the Saint was a little touched that it should never even have occurred to her that his visit to the ladies' clothing shop could have been on her behalf.

"You must be wrong," she said. "Not for me."

She was shaking her head even as she held out her hands to accept the box.

"I'm quite sure I'm not wrong," Simon answered. "Who'd know better than the one who picked it out?"

"Well, thank you," she said quietly.

She put the package on a table next to her bedroom door, then looked at him as her hands touched the red bow. For an instant she brought herself to something like the military posture of attention.

"Thank you," she repeated with great correctness.

"You're welcome. Open it please, if you will. One never knows when something is going to explode these days, and I'd just as soon get the suspense over with."

She pulled the bow loose, apparently being careful to avoid any appearance of excited haste. Before she lifted the cardboard top she looked over at him, questioningly. He nodded. She peered inside.

"Oh, what beautiful. . ." she began.

She brought out a mass of shimmering pale satin and spread it on the bed.

"A lovely dress," she whispered. "And shoes. But what shoes."

She held them up, and she was almost laughing. The slender heels were four inches high, and the tops were almost nonexistent.

"*I?*" she said. "Wear these?"

She studied Simon's face for a moment. Her expression became suspicious.

"You make fun of me?"

It was a suggestion rather than an accusation.

"Nothing could be farther from my mind," the Saint said. "Why would I throw away perfectly good and expensive clothes just for a laugh? There's more, too."

"I see."

But she didn't inspect the smaller black lacy items while he was watching.

"Thank you very much," she said awkwardly, but with genuine feeling. "Now I shall go wash and dress myself."

As she was closing her door she looked back again.

"This is very good of you."

Simon discovered, after finishing his own shaving, bathing, and changing, that female Soviet colonels are no more prompt in dressing for dinner than most other varieties of female. He called room service for ice and water, inspected the delivery for bombs and other quaint attachments, and poured himself a Peter Dawson. He was standing by the fireplace in his dinner jacket, meditating on the strange whims of whatever Fate it is that decides which lives shall cross, when Tanya came out of her room.

To say that he was overwhelmed at the sight of her would be to underestimate the Saint's capacity for subtleties of feeling. In addition to the normal elation produced by the close proximity of any exceptionally beautiful woman, he experienced a curious thrill at the thought that, Svengali-like, he was partly responsible for bringing the beauty into open bloom.

He bowed his respects, and Tanya smiled hesitantly. Her self-consciousness, like that of a girl going to her first formal dance, was as charming to an observer as it probably was uncomfortable for her. The brown hair which had been suppressed into a tight wad at the back of her head now fell free and soft around her face to her bare shoulders. Her

face, though innocent of make-up except for lipstick, was lovely enough to have graced the cover of any Hollywood magazine—which struck Simon, who momentarily wished he had the time to arrange such a photographic appearance for her, as the perfect joke on both the magazine and the Soviet Secret Police.

"You're a gorgeous woman," he said simply, and kissed her hands.

"You are very kind. I still do not understand. . ."

"Why I'd get you these things?"

"Yes."

"I like giving presents, especially to attractive young ladies who're living in hotels in Paris with me. It's a weakness of mine."

Tanya underwent another of her incongruous blushes.

"You embarrass me."

Simon gave her a devilish look as he took the stole she carried and draped it expertly over her shoulders.

"Do I detect a trace of still unviolated bourgeois morality?" he asked.

"You may detect all kinds of strange things. I am suddenly like a fish out of water, in a world I never saw with my own two eyes before, and with a man I. . ."

Simon looked at her expectantly without interrupting as she paused. Suddenly the old suspicious shadow fell across her face again.

"You think I come here without clothes to wear in the Paris restaurants?"

The Saint took her arm and pressed her hand.

"Tanya, don't you have any proverb in Russia about gift horses? When I give intimate gifts such as dresses or lacy lingerie to a lady, it's not because I think she has nothing else to wear. I promise you, my motives weren't in the least noble or charitable."

"Well, you would have been right," she admitted with a sheepish little smile. "I did not have anything proper to wear."

The telephone rang, and the Saint answered it. He recognized Ivan's thick voice in the receiver.

"*Dascha*", Ivan said tersely.

"I beg your pardon?"

"*Dascha,*" the MGB man repeated impatiently. "Say her *dascha.*"

Simon covered the mouthpiece with his hand and turned to Tanya.

"It's Ivan. He wants me to say you '*dascha*', whatever that means."

"My code name," she explained, taking the phone. "You don't expect him to ask for Colonel Smolenko."

She engaged in some heated Russian interchange which seemed to grow increasingly angry on her part and sparse on Ivan's. She clamped down the receiver as if hitting the table with her fist.

"Idiots. They traced Molière to a village twenty kilometers from Paris but have not found him yet."

"Where's Ivan now?"

"A café in some place called Villeneuve, south of here. They are trying to hire a car. They promise they find Molière by morning. They assure me that they have his location, how do you say it, pinned down? But they will not be back here tonight."

"Well, that's very good. I don't think we need them. With the local boss—who I assume is Molière—on the run it should take the Ungodly at least until tomorrow to conjure up another blast. Let's see Paris, shall we?"

They did not see all of Paris, but they saw some of the best that Simon knew, which was the best there was. After cocktails in the jam-packed sophistication of the George V, he took her to dinner at the Tour d'Argent, not perhaps so much for its famous *canard à la presse* as for the entrancing view over the Seine to the floodlit cathedral of Notre Dame. Then when they were full of rich food and beauty and a bottle of '34 Cheval Blanc settled with *ballons* of Delamain cognac, the intimacy of a short taxi ride transported them with hardly a perceptible break to one of those impeccably discreet hideaways which still defy the rising din of the discotheques, for those who prefer the old-world trappings of romance, a place of candlelight, soft music for dancing, and an agreeable absence of tourists.

After a few glasses of champagne on top of their earlier libations, Tanya Smolenko was as off guard and mildly giggly as most other women would have been under similar circumstances. The Saint led her onto the miniscule dance

floor, whose meager dimensions were designed to foster intimate contact rather than terpsichorean athletics, and took her in his arms.

"I must admit," he said, "that this is one of the most peculiar experiences of my life."

Their bodies swayed slowly together to the muted sounds of gypsy violins.

"Bizarre," she said, "but very nice."

"There's no other place like Paris, really."

"All cities look well at night."

"Tanya," he said, "why don't you relax and enjoy it? Answer me truthfully: doesn't all this make your heart beat just the tiniest bit faster?"

"My heart? Of course not. What does it have to do with my heart?"

"You must have a heart somewhere." He slipped his right hand around and under her breast for a moment.

"There," he said, "you do have one. And you aren't telling me the truth. I estimate it's about twenty beats a minute above normal."

"My heart rate is always high. It is my metabolism. It has nothing to do with Paris."

"No? How flattering. Anyway, it's a beautiful metabolism."

He drew her closer to him, their eyes meeting in a wordless communication. Then his lips touched hers in a light leisurely way until she turned her head.

When they returned to the hotel, the trucks of fresh vegetables were rumbling through the city toward pre-dawn market, and the streets were wet from their nocturnal washing. It was one of those late hours which is best left indefinite, so as not to evoke exhaustion the next day by its very recollection.

Simon simply avoided looking at his watch, prolonging the blissful timeless state in which he and Tanya had existed since the sun went down. And if he, who had known virtually all the pleasures of the world, was happy, Tanya, who apparently had known very little beyond the comparatively harsh environment of her birthplace, was euphoric. She was also slightly drunk, which the Saint was not.

As they entered the suite and Simon closed the door, she

held both his hands and looked him in the face.

"I had a most beautiful time."

"So did I, Tanya; I think you'd make any night a success—when you were off duty."

She smiled and slipped her hands to his shoulders, shyly inviting another kiss. But the Saint, moving closer, noticed something on the floor.

"I'm sorry," he said, stooping to pick up the envelope, "but these days one can't be too careful. It's for you, my dear. Feels light and flexible enough. Probably the only thing explosive involved will be me if it turns out to be a billet-doux from a rival admirer."

She smiled and looked curiously at the envelope.

"From Switzerland."

"Do all women do that?" Simon asked, going over to the fresh bucket of ice and bottle of Evian he'd requested in advance be sent up to keep his bottle of Peter Dawson company after the witching hour.

"What?"

"Try to figure out who letters are from before they open them. Don't you have agents in Switzerland?"

She was intent now on slitting the envelope and unfolding the rather heavy paper of the letter. Simon, in order not to seem to pry, devoted his attention to pouring drinks. Tanya's scream took him by surprise.

"Simon! What. . ."

He saw the edges of the letter, as if touched by an invisible flame, begin to curl and turn brown.

"Drop it!" he snapped, and reacted faster than a pouncing cat.

By the time the letter reached the floor he was emptying the ice and water from the bucket over it. His aim was so accurate that the paper was completely sodden, and after emitting a few dying wisps of steam it lay harmlessly on the carpet, a wrinkled sheet of scorched brown.

"The envelope," Tanya said.

Simon had already thought of that and assured himself that it lay inert and inactive where Tanya had let it fall.

"Your friends," he said, "impress me with the variety of distractions they manage to throw our way. I don't know if that was supposed to burn us up, blow us up, or gas us but. . ."

"When I find who does this. . ."

"You and me both," Simon said, admiring the expressively murderous clenching of her fist.

"I crush him like a bedbug."

"I've never had the pleasure of that particular type of violence, but I sympathize completely with your feelings."

He picked up the envelope and examined it.

"Lined with black inside. Sealed airtight, I'm sure. The paper was obviously some sort of plastic sensitized to go off when it was exposed to light and air."

Tanya stood directly in front of him and looked into his eyes very seriously.

"Simon Templar, I have come to trust you. For good reasons. This is the third time, at least, that you save my life. And I know that being together like this, and being who we are, we. . .have a physical attraction. But that could happen even between enemies. A biological thing. I am not ashamed of it."

"Neither am I."

"But Simon—who am I to think. . . After all, consider my position. Who am I to think is behind these things if not the British and Americans? Surely not my own men. Why? Why would they? The whole thing is so pointless. For instance I carry no information or plans in my head on this missions which would make me dangerous to any nation. There is nothing I might reveal. And if I were gone, somebody else would immediately replace me. Yet there have been several attempts on my life already. Can you blame me for suspecting the most obvious enemy?"

"No," Simon said quietly. "It seems to me there are several possibilities, at least. One, that I'm lying, and I'm really here as a hostile agent—but the silliness of that should be pretty obvious by now. I've certainly shown I don't want you dead. A second possibility is of some kind of upheaval or take-over plot within your own organization, but. . ."

"I have thought of that many times, of course. But it makes no sense, and I have checked every facet. There is no pattern to the killing, to whom is killed."

"You'd know about that much better than I. Incidentally, I assume that not all these spying devices of yours are booby-trapped. Just one here and one there, enough to do the job without tipping you off as to the cause. You ob-

viously didn't know it was their own little gadgets that were blowing up your agents until I told you."

She nodded, too preoccupied to bother defending herself.

"But you see the advantage to the British, for example," she said. "So no one of the agents killed is especially important. . .but the constant fear of our equipment exploding would bring about a serious cutback in our activities. We would be forced to recall every piece of apparatus."

"That makes perfect sense," said the Saint. "All I can do is say again that to the best of my knowledge our side are as concerned about this as you are. The fact that I'm here with you should be some kind of evidence of that. And another thing. It seems to me that any kind of cutback you'd be forced to make because of these bombs would be so temporary it wouldn't do us an ounce of good. I think you've got to count that out."

"What do we count in, then?" asked Smolenko.

"One remote possibility would be some individual joker who gets a private kick out of disintegrating Russian agents, but I don't think any one nut could possibly handle this operation, and the chances of several nuts sharing the same mania and working together are practically infinitesimal. We have to look somewhere else for the answer."

"Where?"

"You must have thought of it yourself," he said.

"Of course. China. But it seems so much less likely than. . ."

"Seemed, I hope," said Simon. "I thought I was beginning to convince you."

She smiled and seemed to become a woman again after her reversion to official capacity. She squeezed his hand and kissed him on the cheek.

"I am afraid it is all too easy now for you to convince me of anything. Especially because I've had so much to drink."

She drew back a little, still smiling.

"But let me ask you one thing," she continued. "Would it not be rather clever of the British or Americans or whoever to make me *think* it is the Chinese behind this—and in that way putting a bigger split between us and another socialist power?"

"It would be very clever, Tanya," the Saint said, touching the end of her nose with one finger, "but not half as

clever as you. You're as sharp as a needle even when you're tipsy. I think the only way we'll ever convince you—and me—is to go right to the source of the whole thing."

"Simon, you are not so smart. If we knew the source we would have no problem."

"Tanya, when you have only fragments to work with, little things become significant. You remember where Molière miniaturized equipment comes from?"

"Zürich."

"Zürich. From Grossmeyer, etc. But of course Grossmeyer. And yet when we were still at that record shop I noticed shipping cartons marked Grossmeyer, Cardin, and so forth, mailed from Altbergen—Altbergen being a tiny village in the mountains in southeast Switzerland."

He turned to her from the pacing he'd begun.

"Now, do you know how I know about this obscure village of Altbergen, which would hardly be found on anything but a local hiker's map?"

"Because you have hiked there?"

"No, Altbergen is one spot I've never been to. But I've heard of it, and this afternoon I was reminded of it by more than the packing cartons. You remember the bottle of liqueur, *Grand Abrouillac*, that Molière was so kind as to offer us this afternoon?"

"It seems like years ago."

"Your mind is wandering, sweetheart. You do remember?"

"Of course."

"Well, *Grand Abrouillac* is made in only one place in the world—a monastery in Altbergen, Switzerland."

"Simon, that's fine, but it still does not mean that we know. . ."

"Take another look at this, please."

He handed her the envelope in which the incendiary paper had been mailed.

"The postmark," she said. "Altbergen."

She looked at the envelope more closely, and then at him.

"So," said Simon with the satisfaction that comes of seeing order emerge from chaos, "I think that if Igor and Ivan haven't come up with Molière and plenty of facts by early morning, you and I should take off for Switzerland."

"Alone?"

"Don't shatter all my new illusions, Tanya. You mean

you still believe in bourgeois institutions like chaperones? Or don't you think I'm as good a bodyguard as Ivan or Igor?"

He had poured drinks for both of them, and he put hers in a passive hand.

"Of course, I can leave orders for them to follow us; if we are not here, they will know where to ask for instructions."

"You aren't afraid of shocking them?" he mocked her. "You were on a trip with them when I met you, but I didn't assume they were your lovers. Would such good Soviet Boy Scouts have naughtier minds than mine?"

They were standing close together, and as Tanya sipped her drink her lips moved charmingly into a smile.

"I do not know what is in your mind," she said. "but if you wish to be my lover I expect you to ask me. In such things men should take the lead."

—7—

Simon had called the concierge for a mid-morning flight to Zürich, and just before noon the plane bearing him and Tanya set down at the Zürich airfield. He had arranged in advance for a U-drive car to be waiting, and in a matter of minutes they were on their way into the town, and then driving on through it and out again along the north shore of the lake.

"We'll have lunch at the Ermitage at Küsnacht—it's just a few miles farther on," he said. "There's a beautiful shady terrace right on the water, and their *filets de perche a la mode du fils du pecheur* are something that has to be tasted to be believed."

The setting and the meal were as perfect as he had promised, and perfectly accompanied by the bottle of ice-cold dry Aigle of Montmollin which he ordered.

"I think you are the most decadent man I have ever personally met," she remarked thoughtfully.

He grinned with Saintly impudence.

"And aren't you loving it?"

"We have work to do, and all you think of is what we should eat and drink."

"For tomorrow we die—maybe. And that's not *all* I think

of, as you ought to remember." He held her eyes until she lowered them. "Besides, I've never found I could work better for missing a good meal."

"And while you are enjoying all this, do you never think of the millions in the world who are starving?"

"Sometimes. But I can't convince myself that if I wasn't eating it, any of them would get it."

"You are impossible," she said, and he laughed.

"What did you expect of a horrible capitalist?"

Nevertheless, no one who had been observing them would have taken them for enemies when they left to drive on towards the mountains just faintly visible in the distance.

From the air the Alps had appeared like a great wall of cloud near the horizon, but after Simon and Tanya crossed the lake and bore away to the south-east the peaks took on their true forms as the car began to climb twisting and steeper roads. The winter snows, now just a fading memory in Paris and even in Zürich, stubbornly clung on even below the timberline, where later in the summer, when the whiteness had withdrawn further, the last venturesome scraggly firs would be seen manning the frontier between the rich verdure of the forests below and the raw gray expanses of stone above.

Altbergen was the kind of place whose existence is announced to the traveller by a minute sign pointing from the highway up something like a glorified cowpath. Though Simon had found it on the map, he almost passed the turning, but managed to get his brakes down in time to make the sudden transition from modern highway engineering to rural improvisation.

The car bounded from boulder to pothole with protesting rattles, and it became increasingly obvious as the angle of climb approached something like fifty degrees that what they were on was possibly not a cowpath at all, but an occasional riverbed gouged out by the torrents of thawing spring.

Luckily for the automobile, as well as its occupants, the distance from highway to Altbergen was only seven kilometers—straight up, it seemed at times. But the drive was invigorating, shaking out any last traces of sluggishness traceable to the previous long and perhaps overindulgent evening.

Altbergen was as surprised to see Tanya and Simon as Tanya and Simon were relieved to see it. Set on the green slope of a tiny plateau, its site constituted the only place within miles where more than three houses together might have clung to the ground. As it was, there were not many buildings, perhaps twenty, including a small inn and a few starkly essential shops.

"It's beautiful," Tanya said. "I have seen it only in picture books. Like gingerbread houses."

"Anyway," Simon remarked, "if Ivan and Igor get this far, they won't have much of a search to locate us."

He parked in front of the inn, joining company with a pair of Volkswagens and a squarish *deux chevaux* whose natural tendency to look like a corrugated tin lean-to had apparently been well assisted by numerous trips between Altbergen and the nearest paved road. From across the narrow street, the combined grocer and hardware merchant peered through his display window at the Zürich license plate. The servant girl who had been sweeping the threshhold of the *Gasthof* with no great enthusiasm in the first place came to a complete halt as she gaped curiously at the novelty of city tourists—and rich ones, too, by the looks of them—coming to the *Goldener Hirsch* and unloading baggage with the apparent intention of making a stay.

Altbergen's isolation from the conveniences of modern life meant that checking in simply consisted of being led up the steep stairs by the plump proprietress while the servant girl, a slim blond creature, staggered along behind with all the luggage, refusing Simon's offers of help. There was no surrender of passports for inspection by the police overnight, no filling out of lengthy forms in the usual European manner, whereby one gains entry to sleeping quarters only by confessing in detail a large part of one's own and one's relatives' pasts, and explaining precisely whence one has come and where one is going. There was not even a register to sign, and the proprietress had not asked for names.

"*So, bitte*," she said, smiling as she opened the door of what was obviously the best room "*schön, nicht wahr?*"

"*Sehr schön*," Simon agreed, before Tanya could make any other comment.

The walls were all natural wood, with the lingering smell of fresh-cut lumber about them. There were two beds, huge

and solid, with white comforters a foot thick but light as air. Beyond the double doors was an ornate balcony of the kind that fronted the upper floors of almost every house in the village.

"I didn't want to attract more attention by asking for separate rooms," Simon explained innocently to Tanya, in English. He went on more wickedly: "The only problem will be if Ivan and Igor get here. Which of them would you rather double up with?"

She turned away quickly, towards the balcony.

"Supper is from six o'clock," the proprietress said in leaving. "If you want hot water or anything, the bell is there."

"Oh, Simon, come look."

Tanya was outside, deeply breathing the sharp clear air. The view she wanted him to see was superb: the snow-covered Alps, the dark green meadows studded with outcroppings, of pale stone, the shingled roofs of the houses weighted with chunks of the same rock. There was a peace and timelessness totally unlike any other in the world.

He turned from the view to her, and thought that she looked happier than he had ever seen her. There had been very good moments, but the kind of deep-down contentment that he sensed in her now was something new and different. They seemed a long long way from subterfuge, treachery, and murder.

"You like it here?" he asked her.

"Very much. Yes."

"There's a great feeling of freedom, isn't there?"

She nodded, smiling at the world in general.

"Perhaps."

"More than you could ever have in Russia?" the Saint said.

Such a challenge had been on his mind for some time, but he had hesitated again and again to put it to her for fear she would assume that his true mission all along had been to tempt her to defect from the communist world. But if ever there was to be a moment to risk disrupting the rapport they had begun to achieve, this might have been it.

He realized his misjudgement instantly, in a silence that could almost be physically felt.

"I'm sorry," he said after a moment. "That wasn't very

subtle... I suppose in your position, especially if one has relatives, even close friends who might...face some unpleasant consequences, it makes it difficult even to think about."

She stood straighter, slipping her elbows from the broad rail of the balcony.

"I have never thought in such a way. It is not only difficult, it is impossible."

"Then why are you so touchy about it?" he asked gently.

"I should be. You are hinting at treason, not talking about a. . .a trip to the seaside."

He put his hands soothingly on her shoulders.

"All right. We'll let it pass, okay? This is no time or place to start arguing ideologies. We both have a job to do."

He could feel the tension begin to fade from her body. She took her lower lip between her teeth for a moment and looked him in the face before she answered.

"Okay," she said, and she had to start smiling again just because she'd used that American expression.

"See up there?" the Saint said, pointing. "That looks as if it could be the monastery."

"Where they make the liqueur."

"Mm-hm. And somewhere around here somebody's making something else—and I don't mean that stew and red cabbage you smell."

"Booby traps, I think you call them."

"Yes. Well put. Now you can unpack and freshen up and prepare to greet me properly upon my heroic return."

"Where are you going?"

"Trap shooting, of course."

She followed him back into the bedroom.

"I go with you."

He hesitated for a moment, and shrugged.

"Okay, if you like. This is your affair as much as mine. We shouldn't run into anything on the first reconnaissance where you'd be a liability."

"Really! You forget who I am. In the Soviet Union we recognize no difference between the sexes."

"Well, I do," said Simon, "but then I've had my memory refreshed recently."

"That was not what I meant. My English..."

"Your English is fine, and so are you. Now let's get

going so we can be back here in time for that supper. I have the distinct impression that if we don't dine here we don't dine anywhere, unless you're up to a few unrolled oats from some farmer's horse trough."

They went downstairs and accosted the servant girl, who was still reluctantly applying her broomstraws to the smoothly worn wood of the entranceway, and Simon asked her if there were any factories in the area. He might have asked for dinosaurs.

"Factories, sir? Like where they make autos and things?"

"Any kind of factories."

The girl shook her head.

"No. The only thing we make here is cheese, and there is no factory for that. It is done by the farmers at home."

"Well," Simon said, "in that case, thank you very much."

"*Bitte sehr.* If you wish to see a factory you must go down to Zürich."

Tanya turned back as she and Simon started away.

"I have a small radio that does not work. Can someone here fix it?"

"*Nein. Es tut mir leid.* We have no one to fix anything. If you want things like that, why do you come here?"

"Because I really love peace and quiet," said the Saint.

He set a course that took them through the inquisitive village, across a little stream covered by a neatly built wooden bridge, and along a path that led straight up the slope of the surrounding meadow.

Tanya looked up ahead of them to the spot on the mountainside where man-made walls of gray stone were half hidden by evergreens.

"I hope you are not taking me on a wild goose hunt," she said, avoiding one of the manifold traces which grazing cows had left behind.

" 'Chase'," Simon corrected her. "I didn't really expect to find a transistor radio factory bringing prosperity to the peasants up here at the end of nowhere, but there just has to be some link with it."

"At the monastery?"

"Yes. Think you can make it?"

"Of course. I can still be walking after you have dropped on your face."

But she underestimated both the distance and Simon's

hardmuscled health. His sense of direction took them briskly on across the remainder of the Alpine meadow, past lovely patches of blue and yellow wild flowers, to the foot of a rocky trail that led through the dense forest that clung to the mountainside. A rustic sign with lettering carved precisely into it said: KLOSTER 3/4 St.

"Three-quarters of an hour from here," he said. "But if you're in such great shape, we should be able to shave that to a half."

He set off at a pace that would not have disgraced an energetic chamois. The slope was soon so steep that the path, such as it was, had to zigzag back and forth to maintain a reasonable gradient. Simon went on with springy steps, smiling to himself as he sensed Tanya's increasing difficulties. He took a makeshift staff from some branches left by wood-cutters and began to sing cheerily as they climbed on.

"Mein Vater war ein Wandersmann
Und ich hab's auch im Blut,
Ich wandere hin, ich wandere her,
Und habe frishchen Mut.
Valeri, valera,
Valeri, valera-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha
Valeri, valera,
Und schwenke meinen Hut."

"Stop!" she cried at last; and he stopped and turned, with raised eyebrows.

"Am I that bad? It's an old Tirolean song—perfectly respectable. I thought it went well with the scenery."

"I can't go on. . .so fast," she panted shamelessly.

"Must be the thin air at this altitude," Simon said, with devastating concern. "I should have remembered—it can get the greatest athletes down at first."

She called him something unkind in Russian and flopped down on a pile of cut wood to rest.

"It can't be much further now," he said, after giving her a minute to catch her breath. "When we get there, just don't say anything till I've decided what line to take."

"Don't you know what you are going to say?"

He shrugged.

"Only vaguely. It depends on what reception we get. But

I have great faith in my ability to improvise. It hasn't failed me yet."

They came again to the stream they had crossed down in the meadow; here it had its source, gushing like a miraculous fountain from the rocks. Then, almost without warning, the cold stone of the monastery rose in front of the Saint and Smolenko. Whatever was inside the encircling walls could not be seen from where Simon and Tanya stood. Gates of massive hardwood braced with handwrought iron were solidly closed, and the only means of communication with the inside appeared to be a rusty bell with a pull-rope of plaited cowhide.

"Shall we?"

The Saint rang the bell, and for a long time there was no sound but the twittering of birds and the whisper of an afternoon breeze in the pine needles. Then, like something entirely unearthly, the voices of melodiously chanting men came from within the walls.

"They sound like professionals," Simon said.

Tanya gave him a wry look.

"They are, of course," she said. "Professional parasites on superstitious ignorance."

"Oh, dear comrade, let's not go into that."

He rang again, vigorously, hoping to make the bell heard over the monkly devotionals.

"It might be more polite to wait till they've finished, but they're liable to go on for hours," he explained. "From what little I know about this order, they're extremely hard on themselves. Don't show their faces or say anything except prayers, except for one brother who has a dispensation to conduct any essential business. Dig their own graves and sleep in coffins and scourge themselves twice a day."

"Charming," said Tanya.

There was a rattling sound inside the thick gate, and a sliding board about a foot long and six inches high slid back to show a cowled and black-veiled head. The head said nothing, just hovered there.

"*Gruss Gott*," said the Saint. "May we come in?"

The monk pressed his eyes to the opening as if to see whether or not there were others in the party.

"*Gruss Gott*," the head replied in a voice much less sepulchral than its visible source. "There is not much to see."

"I was told that visitors were always welcome if they made a contribution," Simon said mendaciously.

"The contribution is always twenty francs. For only two, that would be ten francs each."

"I should be glad to give it to such a deserving order."

The open panel slammed shut. There were clanking noises on the other side of the portals, and a moment later one of them creaked partially open. The monk stood with his hand silently extended, palm upwards, until Simon placed the requisite coins in it.

"I am Brother Anton. The Brotherhood are at their devotions in the chapel, as you hear. It will be several hours before they come out, and of course I cannot allow you to disturb their meditations by entering that part of the building. But I will show you what little else I can."

He gestured for them to follow, and together they crossed the open courtyard, which had a stone well with bucket and pulley in the center, and small but profusely growing vegetable gardens around the sides.

The cloister was built of stone so old that its surface was pitted and often crumbling. Here and there an Alpine flower had found a home in some niche or crevice, and velvety green moss grew on the roof shingles. As Simon saw, led and lectured by Brother Anton, the place was in the shape of a square, with the chapel and library comprising one side, the monks' cells two sides, and the refectory and kitchen the fourth side. In the center, by the well, was a small inner quadrangle quartered by crossing walkways and possessed of two stone benches and a stagnant birdbath.

Simon and Tanya were allowed a brief look at all areas except the chapel, from which continued to come the sound of harmoniously chanting male voices. In the kitchen a lone monk, cowled and veiled, stood watch over a gigantic pot on the woodburning stove. He turned to look at the visitors without noticeable reaction and then went back to his cooking. From the pot came a familiar but somehow inappropriate aroma which Simon could not immediately pin down. His mind was busy with other things.

One of the attributes of a supremely alert intelligence such as the Saint's is the ability to see the relationship between apparently unrelated facts. As he listened politely

to Brother Anton's historical notes and pretended to study the architectural details of the ancient building, his thoughts were hours ahead. He was noticing the interesting but seemingly irrelevant fact that the pump in the kitchen, the well in the courtyard, and the source of the stream outside the walls were in a more or less direct line.

"And so," Brother Anton was concluding, "for five centuries, for those who joined us here, the world ended at that door through which you entered."

"But one worldly thing still comes out through it," Simon said, "but for which we might never have heard of this place. Is it possible to see the manufacture of *Grand Abrouillac?*"

He was curious to know whether the cenobite was frowning or smiling under his veil in response to that additional request.

"To see the place, but not to see the method," was the reply. "Therefore, to see very little. But come this way."

"We must not stay long," Simon said pointedly, looking at his watch. "We have friends below in the village who will come up looking for us if we do not return for supper. I don't want them to start worrying about us."

"It will take only a minute to see what I am permitted to show," the monk said.

He led the way down stone steps made smoothly concave by scores of years of sandaled treading. Now they were in a basement whose only windows were narrow grated slits near the ceiling at the level of the ground outside. The walls were lined with the spiraled bottles such as Simon had seen in Molière's office. Jars of herbs and unidentifiable liquids gathered dust on other shelves. Pungently spiritous casks and vats stood about the floor and were racked in tiers along one wall. There was a big wood burning stove at one end of the room with a flue extending into the ceiling.

"Central heat?" Simon inquired.

"Yes. It becomes very cold here even in summer. Only a few hundred meters above us is always snow."

"No point in mortifying the flesh that much," Simon commented in English.

"Bitte?"

"I suppose it would be bad for the brew to freeze."

The Saint touched a kind of thick wooden faucet in the wall, from behind which came a faint gurgling sound.

"The mountain spring water which is one of the secret ingredients?"

"*Sie haben recht.* The water is most important."

The monk took a bottle from one of the shelves.

"If you wish to take a bottle with you, it is forty francs here, much less than outside."

Simon took a bill from his pocket and pressed it into the man's hand.

"*Danke sehr, Bruder.* For your holy work."

"*Vielen dank.*"

"*Bitte.*"

As they started up the stairs, Simon indicated a large ceiling fan which had been almost invisible from directly below because of a kind of false ceiling hung under it.

"You have installed some other modern comforts, I see."

"*Ach, ja.* The fumes, you know. In the old days the brothers used to become quite drunk while working here, merely from breathing."

"All good things must come to an end, I suppose."

"All good things and all bad things," the monk said, and quickly showed them the way out of the cloisters to the main doorway.

Simon had gone with Tanya only a few yards out of sight of the walls when he took her arm and said: "Excuse me just a moment."

He knelt down and put the bottle of *Grand Abrouillac* between two rocks and covered it with pine needles.

"As much as I love good liquor, I love life more, and I'm in no mood to be poisoned, exploded, or shot in the head."

She stared.

"You do not think. . ."

"I do think. And I wouldn't take any chances with anything that came out of that crypt. Now let's go on and make plenty of noise as we recede into the sunset."

Twenty seconds later he stopped again. From above drifted the singing voices of the Brotherhood.

"Why do we wait?" Tanya whispered.

"To listen. I'm a student of bird calls and other forest noises."

The vigil produced results more practical than aesthetic. After about two minutes the voices of the choristers stopped abruptly in mid-syllable, even in mid-note, to say nothing of mid-phrase.

The Saint and Tanya looked at one another.

"No wonder our friends sounded so professional," Simon said. "They were."

"A gramophone record."

"Right, my dear. The invisible Brotherhood is just about as genuine as everything else in that joint. Did you notice those vegetable plots? Weeds bigger than the cabbages. Nobody's bothered to cultivate them for days—or weeks."

He took Tanya's hand, and they went on down the path.

"So," she said, "you think they make our equipment there?"

"Seems very likely. There could be all sorts of hidden chambers. I was studying that possibility, too, but we can't be sure until tonight."

"Tonight?"

"Tonight. When I come back for another look around. I've never liked these conducted tours. By the way," he added with a quizzical frown, "what do you think that was they were cooking in the kitchen?"

"I don't know," she answered absently. "Kasha? Rice?"

Suddenly Simon stopped and looked at her.

"Rice," he said, and threw back his head and laughed.

—8—

A half moon was just riding high enough to illuminate the snow on the great peaks above as the Saint began his return climb to the monastery. Everything was silvered, the sky was clear, and the air was keener than it had been in the daytime. The cold wind's stimulus to his walking speed helped to nullify the reductive effect of his dinner (there was no menu and no choice) of goulash, noodles, and red cabbage.

Tanya had wanted to come, but he had convinced her that it was foolhardy for them both to be committed at the same time. If he had not returned by midnight she would be free to take whatever action she thought best—

an old tactic but, like most lasting traditions, a sound one. It was almost ten o'clock now.

There was another logical reason for her to wait at the *Gasthof*: Ignor and Ivan might arrive at any moment, following directions that had been left in Paris, and any news they had of Molière might be vital. Someone should be at the inn to meet them if they did turn up.

As he came closer to the monastery, Simon's stride slackened and became more stealthy, until the last yards were covered with the silence of a stalking cat. The silence within seemed to be just as complete, and the few leaded windows high up in the walls were dark, but he could not believe that all the inmates would go to sleep at the same time, leaving not one on watch, if his suspicions had any foundation.

He picked up a couple of pebbles in one hand, and stood with his back pressed against the wall to one side of the great doors. In his other hand he held the long branch which he had discarded there on his earlier visit. He reached over and tapped with it on the door. After a pause, he tapped again, insistently. And again.

He heard the spy-slot open, but knew he could not be seen from where he stood. He waited another second or two, and then scratched hard with his stick on the lower part of the far door, where the watcher inside would not possibly see what was doing it.

The panel slid shut, and bolts and bars scraped on the inside. The door gave a faint cautious creak, and the profile of a man came through the opening. But the man was no monk—at least, no monk in the regular accoutrements. He was wearing military style fatigues, boots, and a forage cap. Even more unorthodox was the large pistol he carried, its barrel lengthened by the thick cylinder of a silencer.

Before the sentry's widening arc of survey could wing around far enough to find him, Simon lobbed one of his pebbles straight ahead. The sound of its landing in the underbrush opposite riveted the guard's eyes in that direction; the second pebble, tossed the same way, brought the man a step outside the door, his pistol at the ready.

It was as much space as the Saint needed. He stepped across in one long stride, swinging his stick numbingly into

the watchman's larynx, and then bringing him down with one swift karate chop to the back of the neck.

Simon picked up the pistol and checked it quickly. As an afterthought, he also took the guard's forage cap and put it on—if any others should see him before he saw them, it might in near-darkness be just enough to disguise him for a few seconds that could make vital differences. Then he stepped in through the great doorway and pushed the door shut behind him until it just touched its mate without latching.

The courtyard was dark and deserted, but not all the windows that opened on to the interior were blacked out. The Saint moved on tiptoe towards the nearest one, which he recalled as belonging to the refectory. As soon as he was close enough to look in, he had complete and startling confirmation of what had only been a vague impression when he had glimpsed the doorkeeper's features in the moonlight.

The sight would undoubtedly have caused the founding father of Kloster Altbergen to sit up in his do-it-yourself grave and demand an entire keg of *Grand Abrouillac*, for his venerable dining hall was populated by half a dozen Chinese.

They were not dressed in grim woolly habits, but in shirt sleeves or white laboratory coats. They were not engaged in silent meditation, but in gambling games, idle conversation, and cigarette smoking.

On the whole they were not husky or even particularly robust-looking men, which led the Saint to the swift conclusion that they constituted a technical rather than a military task force. If there were other trained soldiers such as the guard probably had been, they were not in sight. And it also appeared that unless egalitarianism in China had gone further than he suspected, there appeared to be no leader among the group. The men had the air of comrades glad to be relaxing at the end of a day's routine work.

The Saint dragged himself away from that fascinating spectacle and moved around the cloisters until he came to another lighted window.

There he hit the jackpot: a rather overweight Chinese gentleman in a green uniform without insignia was sitting at a table in the library; with him was another man, not Chinese but some variety of European. What language they

were speaking could not be heard through the sealed glass. Between them on the table was a pile of gold coins and a sort of record book in which the Chinese—whom Simon immediately christened "the general"—would occasionally write something.

The European, who the Saint now assumed to be "Brother Anton", was not in black robes either, but in a suede jacket, and he seemed to have just concluded a discussion with the general. He stood and left the room as the Chinese went back to his calculations.

Simon flattened himself behind a pillar; Anton emerged through a narrow passage into the courtyard a few feet away. The erstwhile monk stretched his arms, took a deep breath, and admired the moon.

Then, as his gaze returned earthwards, he seemed to be transfixed by some much less pacifying vision. For three or four seconds he stood frozen in unnatural rigidity, and then he whirled around and rushed back to the entrance from which he had emerged, yelling something shrill and incomprehensible, but the Saint had no need of a literal translation to recognize the strident urgency of the alarm.

Looking around to discover what could have triggered it, he saw that the big door which he had been so careful to almost close was now wide open. The mild force of the wind could not possibly have moved the heavy gate on its hinges, and the guard Simon had disposed of would be out for some time more, if not permanently.

Turning back again the other way, the Saint had a glimpse through the window of the general scraping gold coins into a leather purse which he jammed in his pocket as he jumped to his feet. Anton lunged into the room and pressed a button which set off muted alarm bells throughout the monastery.

Simon stooped low and dash for the well. Sticking the guard's automatic into his belt, he swung his legs over the waist-high circular wall, seized the doubled rope which hung from the pulley on the scaffolding above his head, and slid down so that he was just able to see what was happening around him.

He had already been asking himself if Tanya had followed alone, or if Ivan and Igor had arrived after he left and come up to the monastery with her. Then, as the Chinese

were hurrying out of the refectory, he saw a shadowy figure dart from near the gate into the passage taken a few moments before by Anton.

He was sure it was Tanya. She had probably seen him in his borrowed cap and mistaken him for a guard. Seconds later he saw her through the lighted window holding a pistol on the general and Anton.

The alarm had roused the refectory, and an influx of shouting, confusedly milling people into the courtyard allowed the Saint no more time to watch Tanya's progress. He slipped down about two feet, straddled the bucket which swung at one end of the rope, and held himself steady by grasping the other strand. Knocking the forage cap deliberately from his head, he heard it plop into water just a couple of yards underneath him, and then he listened closely in order to follow the events taking place above.

An authoritative voice was calling out in Chinese over the hubbub, and all activity seemed to come to an abrupt halt. The excited shouts died away, and the running feet were still. Simon raised himself so that he could see. The half dozen civilians, joined by Anton and a pair of men in uniforms like that of the guard who had originally been at the gate were standing frozen, watching Tanya holding her pistol near the general's head in one of the archways.

She and her hostage had apparently already discovered that they had a common language in English.

"Tell them to be still and put their guns down, or I shoot you," she said. "Also, my men are watching and will fire if they resist."

"Yes," said the general.

He called something in Chinese, and the guards dropped their weapons.

"Where is that pig, Templar?" Tanya asked.

The general shook his head.

"I do not understand."

"A man came here before me. Where is he?"

"No man. We see no man."

Simon might have spoken then, but the uncomplimentary epithet which Tanya had attached to his name made him reticent. Besides, just at that moment one of the Chinese civilians let out a yelp, pointing at the well. The Saint let the taut rope slip quickly through his hands, dropping him

from the sight of those above ground. As he descended he could hear Tanya's voice above the others.

"What is it?"

"Man in well," the general translated.

Simon could not distinguish any more words in the confusion of sounds that echoed in the depths of the well. He did not particularly care; he was much more interested in avoiding being trapped and possibly shot like a fish in a barrel. He could only hope that a theory he had formed in the afternoon would turn out to be right: He believed that an underground stream ran under the monastery, passing through the well, under the kitchen, and directly beside the liquer-making vault.

Letting go the rope entirely, he dropped down into the water and found footing on the slippery bottom, bracing himself against the curving wall. To his relief, he felt that the water, which reached above his waist, was flowing and not still. Though his pistol had been submerged and possibly out of commission, his breast pocket flashlight was in working order.

No rain of bullets was yet descending upon his head, but he moved quickly anyway. His feeble light showed him that his hopes of a tunnel carrying the water were better than confirmed: the channel seemed to have been artificially enlarged, possibly centuries before, at its downstream exit from the well—the direction which led toward the kitchen and the basement he had seen in the afternoon.

Inside the narrow passage the water level was higher than in the well, but there was still room for a man's head and shoulders above the surface. Undoubtedly the monks of older, more generally dangerous times had used the tunnel for some such purpose as the Saint was using it now, and it seemed likely that in their anxiety and eagerness to escape from irreverent barons or rampaging Protestants they would have provided a more private means of entrance and exit than the well in the middle of their courtyard.

Simon moved on with the flowing water until he saw a glimmer of light. It was not, however, the door he had hoped for. Putting his eye to the glowing chink in the wall he found that he was standing just outside the basement he had visited earlier in the day. He could see the rows of bottles and tiers of casks. Then he saw Tanya and the gen-

eral coming into the basement from the foot of the steps, Tanya's postol still pointed at the nape of the general's neck. The Saint postulated that either she was pulling a good bluff, or that Igor and Ivan had shown themselves and taken control in the courtyard.

"And where are the real monks?" she was asking.

"In heaven, of course," the general replied, with successful irony in spite of his bad pronunciation. "They were ready. Graves already dug."

"Where are the devices made?"

The general was not so cooperative in response to that inquiry.

"Speak," she said, "or I shoot."

"They are made here," he said.

"Where?"

The general made a resigned gesture of his shoulders and hands.

"I show you. You see. I push this first."

Tanya aimed the pistol more carefully and tightened her finger on the trigger.

"Slowly," she cautioned.

The general nodded and pressed something on which a wooden ladle was hanging. There was an electric humming, then a rumbling sound as the central sections of the two longest walls of the chamber began pivoting. The place was transformed, as the shelves of dusty bottles swung out of sight, into an entirely modern workshop. The newly revealed sides of the walls were lined with work benches and shelves covered with electronic components, chemicals, precision tools —and large numbers of the familiar exploding transistor radios and lighter-cameras.

"Give me samples of the micro-explosive and the formula for it before we destroy this place."

The general did not move.

"I destroy you also unless you give me the formula," Tanya said. "You have tried to kill me many times. It would not seem unfair for me to kill you once."

"I give," said the general.

He pointed to a large chest.

"There."

"Get it," Tanya told him.

As she turned to keep her gun on the general, arms reached

suddenly from draperies and grabbed her, knocking aside the gun and throwing her onto the floor out of the Saint's field of view.

He moved swiftly further down the tunnel, searching for a connection between the passage and the monastery vaults. Within twenty paces he found it: a small door with a circle of pocked iron which served as a handle. Bracing his feet he put all his strength into the pull. The hinges seemed to be rusted solid, but their fastenings were so old that they gave way and bent soundlessly.

Simon stepped into the dryness and warmth of a small unlighted room crowded with crates and piles of cardboard cartons. He did not need his flashlight, for the door of the room was half open, letting through enough indirect illumination to allow him to find his way quietly around the heaps of boxes. There was a fire extinguisher and an ax on the wall by the door, and overhead like a tangle of snakes ran a thick bundle of electric cables. This was obviously not one of those rooms open to tourists.

He realized immediately, as he got a look into the main basement through dark curtains just slightly parted at the doorway, that he was standing in the exact spot where Tanya's captor had stood to grab her. The general and two other uniformed Chinese, their backs toward the Saint, held pistols on Tanya.

"Drop your guns," Simon said, thinking it best to communicate his wishes in the simplest possible English.

At the same time, he stuck his automatic through the curtains. When the Chinese had dropped their pistols to the floor he showed himself.

"If you think you're surprised, Tanya, dear, you should have seen my face when you showed up."

Before she could reply, the general let out a desperate shout, and the two other men dove for Simon. It would have been a suicidal move on their part except for one thing: when the Saint pulled the trigger of his automatic it emitted only a sodden click. He was hurled back against the wall, his head glancing against the stones.

When his vision cleared a moment later the Chinese were once more in control, holding their dry pistols on him and Tanya.

"You are interested in our work, and you have seen,"

the general said. "Now we take you back upstairs and kill you."

"Where are Ivan and Igor?" the Saint asked Tanya.

"Quiet," snapped the general.

But looking at Tanya, Simon saw her give a kind of answer with an upward roll of her eyes.

The general opened a big refrigerator and checked the contents—rows of small amber bottles.

"You not take anything from here?" he asked Simon.

"No."

The general went on counting. When he closed the door again he looked satisfied.

"Explosive," he said. "Fuses must be cold." He nodded toward the woodburning heater, which showed orange flame through its grill. "Heat make explosion. Very big."

Then he set into operation the mechanism that pivoted the walls, and half a minute later the chamber had once more become the dusty home of *Grand Abrouillac*.

"Now," the general said, pointing into the side room through which Simon had come. "This way."

As they went through the curtains and passed the threshhold, Simon whispered to Tanya, "Scream your head off. Now!"

She screamed with enough force to frighten a banshee, furnishing an instant of confusion which was all the Saint needed. He toppled a pile of cartons toward the guards, snatched the fire ax from the wall, and sank the heavy blade into the mass of electric cables. The wooden handle insulated him from the spectacular multiplicity of short circuits which resulted. Sparks exploded over the room as the light bulbs went off, and in the weird flashing brilliance Simon was able to see enough to swing his medieval weapon again with deadly accuracy.

Both guards went down, and Tanya, who had crouched to escape the whistling blade, grabbed one of their pistols. The sparks were dying, and the general had plunged back into the pitch darkness of the liqueur-making vault. The fine beam of Simon's light caught him as he felt his way to the foot of the stairs.

Tanya fired, and the general sprawled heavily forward onto the stone floor. Instantly there was a tremendous fusillade of gunfire at ground level outside.

"Ivan and Igor!" Tanya cried, and bolted up the stairs. "They were guarding the Chinese upstairs."

"Stay inside!" Simon called after her.

He had stooped by the general's body. Now he followed her up to the door and stopped her before she could unbolt it. But already the outburst of shots was dwindling. As the Saint pushed Tanya back and opened the door himself he heard only three scattered reports, and then no more.

Igor leaned against the wall a few feet away, clutching a bloody arm. Ivan came running up, automatic in hand, calling anxious questions in Russian.

As Smolenko answered, Simon looked over the moonlit courtyard, where bodies lay scattered over the ancient ground like fallen puppets. It was fairly obvious that Igor and Ivan had been distracted momentarily by Tanya's shot, and their prisoners had gone for their own guns. The Russians, sheltered by shadows and the stone archways of the cloisters while their enemies were caught in the open, had won the battle, and all the Chinese, with Anton, lay dead.

"I never thought I'd be glad to see you two," Simon said to Ivan and Igor.

"I'm afraid this will change your mind."

It was Tanya speaking, and she aimed her pistol at his chest. Calm but puzzled he looked at her.

"I don't understand," he said levelly.

"Molière told them before they killed him—about your real mission."

"My real mission? I'm sincerely curious to know what that is."

"To use me until you had found the micro-explosive, and then to dispose of us and steal the formula yourself."

Simon shook his head.

"Molière was just trying to save his skin."

Tanya's voice was louder.

"You used me. Made me a fool. But now it no longer matters. Ivan and Igor received orders from higher—to kill you. Now we shall have the explosive and you shall not have even your life. Ivan, go below and bring up samples. The formula may be in a chest beside the refrigerator."

"Sorry to disappoint you, Colonel," Simon said, "but nobody gets the formula."

"What do you mean?"

"No electricity. The movable walls are jammed solid."

"Ivan. Wait." She thought for a second. "We repair the wires."

"No time. Remember the refrigerator full of fuses and explosives? The cooling has stopped, but that woodburning monster of a stove is still going full blast. It would take several hours to untangle and match up and reconnect all those melted wires, and by that time this place will have been transformed into picturesque ruins."

"You planned this, so we could not get the formula!"

"I must admit that the thought did pass through my mind. On the other hand, remember that I won't get it either."

Tanya's face twisted into an expression of hatred. She lowered the pistol and slapped him again and again. He did not flinch, but his eyes narrowed.

"I dare you to do that without your army around."

"You swine! You lied—cheated me."

Igor raised his pistol.

"We have orders. I kill him."

"No," Tanya said. "He is mine. Go."

The men hesitated.

"Go, I say. Have Igor's arm attended to. Prepare the car and my luggage."

Ivan and Igor left the courtyard by the main gates. Simon leaned back against the wall and waited as Tanya turned to confront him. Even in the moonlight he could not make out the nuances of her expression.

"Isn't the condemned man allowed a last request?" he asked lightly.

Tanya did not answer, only waited, holding the gun on him as the ponderous footsteps of Ivan and Igor receded down the path.

"It's usually a cigarette," the Saint said, "but since I've given up smoking, how about a kiss? In memory of old times."

"I could never come so close," she said slowly. "I understand that it would be deadly to touch with my gun anybody so skilled in the arts of self defense as you."

"You never can tell," he said.

For several seconds they faced one another without speak-

ing as clouds scudded across the face of the moon, and rising winds gave a voice to the forest.

Then Tanya stepped forward and placed the barrel of her pistol against his chest.

He pushed the cold steel aside and pulled her body close, kissing her deeply.

"You will have to make it seem real," she whispered. "Hit me hard, and then run. They may be waiting near. Can you go over the wall?"

"There's a door from the kitchen to the outside. I saw it this afternoon. I'll take your gun and shoot the lock if necessary."

He took her face in his hands and forced her to look him in the eyes.

"The door's big enough for two, and there's a big world on the other side of it."

"I. . .I'm afraid that is quite impossible. Maybe. . ."

"Later?"

"Later. Perhaps. But now. . .hit me after I fire one shot."

"Goodbye, comrade."

"Goodbye."

She fired the pistol into one of the crumbling arches. Simon hit her, just hard enough, and caught her in his arms as her knees buckled and her gun dropped to the ground. He lowered her gently, smoothed the soft brown hair from her face, and walked swiftly from the courtyard into the kitchen. The outer door was padlocked, but a single shot freed it.

Striding and sliding down the pathless mountainside, he felt a bittersweet mixture of sadness and relief. He paused and looked back up at the hulk of old stone almost lost to his sight among the moon-touched firs. Then he turned, measured the weight of the general's purse of gold coins which had by some mysterious means found its way into his Saintly pocket, and went on down once more for a while to the world of ordinary things.

imperious caesar

by Michael Innes

"It all began," Appleby said, "with a Professor writing a learned article called *Shakespeare's Stage Blood.* He wasn't starting a theory that the Bard came of a long line of actors. He was simply showing from a study of the old texts that the Elizabethan theatre was a thoroughly gory place."

The Vicar nodded. "Carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts," he quoted cheerfully. "Accidental judgements, casual slaughters, death put on by cunning and forced cause—"

"Quite so. But the relevant point was this: when *X* drew his dagger or rapier on the stage of the Globe and appeared to stab *Y*, what in fact he did stab was a concealed bladder, full of some sort of red paint. The stuff spurted out all over the place, and gave an engaging impression of a neatly severed artery."

"Messy. One hopes it came out in the wash."

In our March 1967 issue we brought you Mr. Innes' story about the actor who had not anticipated that Appleby of Scotland Yard would be an unexpected witness to his departure from the script. . .And here is the story of a bitter man, who hated those around him—much, much too well. . .Mr. Innes is of course the author of THE PAPER THUNDERBOLT, THE SEVEN SUSPECTS, DEAD MAN'S SHOES, and of other novels.

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"No doubt it did. But the immediate effect was terrific. All concerned simply wallowed in this bogus blood, and the audience got no end of a thrill. Now, no sooner had the Professor published his discovery than it greatly took the fancy of a chap called Cherry, who was the moving spirit of a group of amateur players at Nessfield. Most of his company belonged to the staff of the University there, and this blood-bath business apparently gave very general pleasure to all. It was felt that something should be done to put this discovery about Shakespeare's stage into practice. So Cherry decided that the next play should be *Julius Caesar*."

The Vicar chuckled. "'Stoop, Romans, stoop, and let us bathe our hands in Caesar's blood.'"

"Precisely. 'Up to the elbows, and besmear our swords.' Contemplating that scene, Cherry, you may say, simply saw red. As it happened, I was visiting a friend of some consequence in those parts, and he took me along to the performance. For some reason that I didn't gather, it was quite an occasion, and we sat among a whole gaggle of the local nobs, all doing Cherry and his friends proud.

"They played uncommonly well. The scene in the Senate House built up some first-rate suspense, and when at length the conspirators had edged round Caesar and isolated him beside Pompey's statue, the audience was as keyed up as ever I've seen it at a professional production. Then Casca gave his signal, and that dignified group of noble Romans closed in like a rugger scrum, and had a high old time stabbing and hacking for all they were worth. You wouldn't have believed, Vicar, that most of them were Doctors of Philosophy and Readers in Ancient Hebrew and such like. And the gore! It exceeded all expectations. Every one of the conspirators — Brutus, Cassius, Casca, Decius, Cinna, and the rest—"

"Ligarius, Trebonius, and Metellus." The Vicar rubbed his hands in mild self-congratulation. "Once learnt, one doesn't forget these things."

"They were all dripping some beastly stuff supplied, I imagine, by the Department of Chemistry. And the rest of the scene went with a swing—Mark Antony's 'Cry Havoc' speech and all. It was only when Antony and the servant of Octavius started to bear away the body that things went wrong. You see, it *was* a body. Caesar had

been stabbed through the heart."

The Vicar looked serious, but his memory did not fail him. "'Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay' eh? What an uncommonly disconcerting business."

Appleby nodded. "It was clearly *my* business, whether disconcerting or not. Scotland Yard was in the stalls, and Scotland Yard had to step into the limelight. So I got my august friend to announce my presence in due form, and there and then I took charge. Within half an hour I felt like concluding myself to be at grips with the perfect murder.

"Caesar—I needn't drag up those people's real names—had been an unpopular figure about the place. He was a mathematician with a boring habit of pestering his colleagues with insoluble problems. He and Cassius had had a tremendous row over something entirely technical; Brutus was believed to be his bitter rival for the next Fellowship of some important scientific society; and Casca was convinced that he had done him out of a job."

"Ah!" The Vicar was impressed. "There looks to have been quite a field. But I put my money on Casca. 'See what a rent the envious Casca made.'"

"These things might be far from very substantial motives for murder. But they hinted an atmosphere which might nurse really bad blood —*real* blood, you may say. And now think of the actual melée. There's nothing like a crowd of amateurs for doing that sort of thing in a really whole-hearted way, and for a conspirator meaning actual homicide, this bit of stage assassination was ideal cover.

"And all I had to go on was a bunch of confused statements by these people—that, and eight daggers; seven of them trick daggers of the sort that disappear up the sheath, and one of an authentic and deadly kind. The seven were dripping this beastly red muck; the eighth —"

"A nasty contrast, indeed." The Vicar was sober. "'And as he plucked his cursed steel away, mark how the blood of Caesar followed it.' Would there be fingerprints?"

"I hadn't much hope from then—and so I was the more pleased when I suddenly had an idea. I gathered the cast together; told them I believed I knew who was responsible; and announced that I was going to have them enact

the scene over again, with myself as Caesar."

"My dear fellow, wasn't that rather risky? If the crime had been the work, say, of a homicidal maniac, this second chance—"

"There were to be no daggers this time, and no disgusting red paint. Even so, I got well thumped, for those people's zest for violence wasn't to be exhausted by the mere spectacle of a murdered colleague. They found the re-enacting thoroughly enjoyable. And I don't doubt that, at the end of it, they were extremely disappointed when I simply told them to go home."

"To go home!"

"Certainly. For all I'd wanted to do, you see, was to *count*—to count the conspirators. And my memory proved right. Eight daggers made one too many.

"It's true that there are eight conspirators, and you completed my own list quite correctly. But Trebonius' job, you may recall, is to get Antony out of the way; and so he isn't concerned in the killing. Caesar, in fact, had killed himself. For distressing reasons into which I needn't enter, his life was no longer of any use to him; and it had pleased him to exploit the occasion of his own suicide to set his colleagues, and the world in general, a final little problem."

"My dear Appleby, this is a very shocking story. Suppose that one of those unfortunate conspirators had actually been suspected of murder."

"Nothing would have pleased Caesar more. He was a thoroughly malicious fellow—and, like the real Caesar, a good deal of an exhibitionist. He liked staging that sensation for all the important citizens of Nessfield. And had Casca or Cassius been brought to trial, he would have been delighted. He had even left with a crony a letter addressed to the Home Secretary and telling the whole story. It was to be posted—"

"Only in the event of a criminal trial?"

"Only in the event of somebody having been hanged."

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through a glass, darkly

by Helen McCloy

In her own mind Mrs. Lightfoot thought of the whole matter as "that unfortunate affair of Faustina Crayle." Characteristically she did not try to find out what had actually happened. She showed little curiosity and no fear. Whether the peculiar gossip about Faustina Crayle was based on malicious lying or hysterical hallucination, its effect was equally damaging to the Brereton School. That was the only thing that mattered to a headmistress as single-minded as Mrs. Lightfoot.

By the end of the week she was comfortably sure she would never hear the name Crayle again. And then, that bright October morning, when she was just settled in the study with her morning mail, Arlene brought her that dreadful visiting card:

Helen McCloy, former National President of the Mystery Writers of America, is of course the author of TWO THIRDS OF A GHOST, ALIAS BASIL WILLING, PANIC, BEFORE I DIE, etc. Both CHINOISERIE (SM, March 1967) and this story are recognized classics in this field.

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Dr. Basil Willing
Medical Assistant to the District Attorney of New York County

The man, Willing, did not look like her idea of a man who held a political appointment in New York. He entered the room with easy, not ungraceful deliberation. He had the lean figure and sun-browned skin that come from living outdoors. Yet the wide brow and deep-set eyes gave his face a stamp of thoughtfulness. Those eyes were more alert, direct, and disturbing than any she had ever seen.

"Dr. Willing?" Mrs. Lightfoot held his card fastidiously between thumb and forefinger. "This is Massachusetts, not New York. And I fail to see how anything at Brereton can interest the district attorney or his medical assistant."

"That happened to be the only card I had with me," returned Basil. "I rarely use it. The district attorney's office plays only a small part in my working life. I'm a doctor of medicine, specializing in psychiatry. And I've come to see you because Faustina Crayle consulted me. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Paul Willing, employed her as a governess two years ago."

Mrs. Lightfoot could be blunt when necessary. "Just what do you want?"

Basil met this with equal bluntness. "To know why your art teacher, Faustina Crayle, was dismissed after five weeks' employment, without warning or reason given, even though, under her contract, you had to pay her a year's salary for the five weeks."

So Faustina hadn't told him the truth. Or. . .could it be she didn't know the truth herself?

"I've ruled out any defect in teaching method or scholarship, appearance or deportment," Basil was saying. "My sister-in-law would not have employed Miss Crayle if she had any fault so obvious and you wouldn't hesitate to have called such a fault to her attention. What remains? Something libelous that you suspect and can't prove. One of our old friends dipsomania, kleptomania, or nymphomania. Lesbianism is always with us. And now there's communism. Miss Crayle might have concealed any one of these *gaucheries* from my sister-in-law since Miss

Crayle did not live with the Paul Willings. She was only in their apartment for a few hours each day."

Mrs. Lightfoot lifted her eyes. "It was none of those things."

Basil saw with surprise that she was genuinely moved. He realized that it was a rare thing for such a woman to feel strong emotion. "What was it, Mrs. Lightfoot? I think you owe it to Miss Crayle to let her know. You've made it almost impossible for her to get another position as a teacher. People talk. And then. . .two curious incidents occurred, just as Miss Crayle was leaving, which she herself cannot explain. She met two pupils on the stairs, girls of thirteen—Barbara Vining and Diana Chase. She said their faces were 'bland as milk' and a pair of light voices fluted demurely: 'Good-bye, Miss Crayle!' But when she had passed them, a sound followed her down the stairwell—a faint, thin giggle, shrill and tiny as the laughter the Japanese attribute to mice. . . In the lower hall Miss Crayle passed one of the maids. Arlene Murphy. Her behavior was even more extraordinary. She shrank back, with dilated eyes, as if she were afraid of Miss Crayle."

Mrs. Lightfoot was beaten. "I suppose I'll have to tell you."

He studied her face. "Why are you afraid to tell me?"

Her answer startled him. "Because you won't believe me. You'd better hear it from some of the eye-witnesses. We'll start with Arlene." She pressed a bell on the wall beside her.

The maid was as young as the graduating class at Brereton—probably eighteen, at the most twenty. Under a white apron, she wore a gray chambray dress, high-necked, long sleeved, full-skirted. Mrs. Lightfoot had won the battle for low heels and no cosmetics, but Arlene had carried two other hotly contested points—flesh-colored stockings and no cap.

"Come in and shut the door, Arlene. Will you please repeat to Dr. Willing what you told me about Miss Crayle?"

"Yes, ma'am, but you said not to tell anybody!"

"I'm releasing you from that promise, just this once."

Arlene turned vacant, brown eyes on Basil. Her brows were hairless. This gave her face a singularly naked look. Some glandular deficiency, he suspected. She was breathing through her mouth and that made her look stupid.

"I was upstairs, turning down beds for the night," said Arlene. "When I got through, I started down the backstairs. It was getting dark, but it was still light enough to see the steps. Those backstairs are enclosed, but there's two windows. I saw Miss Crayle coming up the stair, toward me. I thought it was a bit odd for her to be using the backstairs instead of the front. I says: 'Good evening, Miss.' But she didn't answer. She didn't even look at me. She just went on up to the second floor. That was kinda queer 'cause she was always polite to everybody. But even then I didn't think much about it until I went on down into the kitchen and. . ." Arlene paused to swallow. "There was Miss Crayle."

The girl's hands were trembling. Her eyes searched Basil's face for some sign of disbelief. "Honest, sir, she couldn't have got back to the kitchen by way of the upper hall, the front stairs, the dining room, or the pantry. Not in the little time it took me to finish going down the backstairs to the kitchen. She just couldn't, even if she'd run."

"What was Miss Crayle doing in the kitchen?" asked Basil.

"She had some flowers she'd just got in the garden. She was fixing a vase with water at the table by the sink."

"Were the two dressed exactly the same way? The one on the stair and the one in the kitchen?"

"Like as two peas. Brown felt hat. Bluish gray coat. Covert, I think they call it. No fur, no real style at all. And brown shoes. The kind with no tongues and criss-cross laces they call 'ghillies.' And some old pigskin gloves she always used for gardening."

"Did the hat have a brim?"

"Uh-huh. I mean, yes, sir."

"Did you see Miss Crayle's face on the backstairs?"

"Yes, sir. I didn't look at her particular. No reason why I should. And the hat brim was down over her eyes. But I saw her nose and mouth and chin. I'd swear it was her."

"Did you speak to Miss Crayle in the kitchen?"

"Soon as I got my breath, I says: 'Lord, miss, you give me a turn! I coulda sworn I just passed you on the stair, comin' down.' She smiled and said: 'You musta been mistaken, Arlene. I been in the west garden the last half

hour. I only just come into the house and I haven't been upstairs yet.' Well, sir, you know how it is. Something like that happens and you think: 'What the—' I mean: 'Oh, well, I musta been mistaken.' And that's the end of it. . .if nothing more happens. But this time—well, that was just the beginning. In a week or so there was stories going all over the school about Miss Crayle and—"

Mrs. Lightfoot interrupted. "That will do, Arlene. Thank you. And will you please ask Miss Vining and Miss Chase to come to my study immediately?"

"Goethe," said Basil, as the door shut. "The gray suit with gilt edging. Emilie Sagée. And *The Tale of Tod Lapraik*. The *doppelgänger* of the Germans. The *ka* of the Egyptians. The double of English folk lore. You see a figure, solid, three-dimensional, brightly colored, moving and obeying all the laws of optics. Its clothing or posture is vaguely familiar. It turns its head and—you are looking at yourself. A perfect mirror-image of yourself, only—there is no mirror. And that frightens you. For tradition tells you that he who sees his own double must die."

"Only if he sees it face to face," amended Mrs. Lightfoot. "The history of the *doppelgänger* legend is very curious. Lately I've begun to wonder if the atmosphere could act as a mirror under certain conditions, something like a mirage but reflecting only one person. . ."

A light tap fell on the door. Two little girls about thirteen entered the study and curtsied to Basil when Mrs. Lightfoot introduced them as Barbara Vining and Diana Chase.

The drab masculinity of the Brereton uniform merely heightened by contrast the delicate, feminine coloring of Barbara Vining—pink and white skin, silver-gold hair, and eyes the misty blue of star sapphires. The line of her lips was so subtly turned that even in repose they seemed to quiver on the edge of suppressed laughter.

The same uniform brought out all that was plain and dull in Diana Chase: the straight, mouse-colored hair; the pinched, white face; the forlorn mouth. Only the eyes, a clear hazel, showed a sly spark of potential mischief.

They listened gravely as Mrs. Lightfoot explained what she wanted. "Barbara, suppose you tell Dr. Willing what happened. Diana, you may correct Barbara if she

makes any mistake."

"Yes, Mrs. Lightfoot." The faint pink in Barbara's cheeks warmed to rose. Obviously she enjoyed being the centre of the stage. "We two were in the writing room on the ground floor. I was writing my brother, Raymond, and Diana was writing her mother. All the other girls were down at the basketball field and most of the teachers. But she was outside the middle window—Miss Crayle. It was a French window, standing open, so I could see her plainly. She'd set her easel up in the middle of the lawn and she was sketching in water colors. She was wearing a blue coat but no hat. It was fun watching the quick, sure way she handled her brush."

"You've forgotten the armchair," put in Diana.

"Armchair? Oh..." Barbara turned back to Basil. "There was an armchair in that room with a slip-cover in Delft blue. We called it 'Miss Crayle's chair' because she sat there so often. I rather expected her to come in and sit in that chair when she was through painting and then—it happened." Barbara's voice faded, suddenly shy.

Diana took over. "I looked up and saw that Miss Crayle had come in without my hearing her. She was sitting in the blue armchair, her hands loose in her lap, her head resting against the back. She didn't seem to notice me, so I went on writing. After a while, I looked up again. She was still in the armchair. But that time my eyes wandered over to the window and..." Diana lost her nerve. "You tell him, Babs."

"Miss Crayle was still sketching outside the window?" suggested Basil.

"I suppose Mrs. Lightfoot told you." Barbara looked at him sharply. "I heard Di gasp, so I looked up and saw her staring at two Miss Crayles—one in the armchair, in the room with us; the other on the lawn, outside the window. The one in the chair was perfectly still. The one outside the window was moving. Only..." Barbara's voice wavered. "I told you how quick and sure her motions were? Well, after we saw the figure in the chair, the figure outside the window was—slower. Every movement was sort of languid and weighted. Like a slow-motion picture."

"Made me think of a sleepwalker," added Diana.

"What was the light like?"

"Bright sunlight on the

lawn," answered Barbara. "So bright the shades were drawn halfway down inside."

"It was pretty awful," went on Diana. "Sitting there, the two of us, alone in the room with that—that thing in the armchair. And the real Miss Crayle outside painting in that slow, unnatural way. Afterward, I thought of all sorts of things we might have done. Like trying to touch the thing in the chair. Or calling to Miss Crayle from the window and waking her from her—her trance or whatever it was. But at the time—well, I was just too frightened to think or move."

"I sat there and told myself it wasn't happening," said Barbara. "Only it was. I suppose it only lasted a minute or so. It seemed like a hundred years. Then the figure in the chair got up and went into the hall without a sound. The door was standing open and it seemed to melt into the shadows beyond. We sat there about three seconds. Then we ran to the door. There was no one in sight. So we went back to the window but—Miss Crayle had gone. . . ."

When they were alone, Mrs. Lightfoot looked at Basil. "Was a practical woman ever confronted with such a fantastic problem? Six girls have been withdrawn from Brereton already. That's why Miss Crayle had to go."

"But Barbara and Diana are still here. Didn't they write their parents about this?"

"Barbara has no parents—only a brother, a rather light-hearted young man of twenty-six who doesn't take his duties as guardian too seriously. Diana's parents are divorced. The father lives with a second wife in California. The mother is chiefly occupied in nursing her grievances against the father and nagging the courts to increase her alimony. Neither is greatly concerned with Diana. She's been a pupil here since her seventh year. Barbara only came to us this Fall. She's been going to a day school in New York."

Basil studied the intelligent face under the sleek mound of dark hair flecked with gray. "What is your own opinion?"

A hint of defiance crept into Mrs. Lightfoot's voice. "I am a modern woman, Dr. Willing. That means I was born without faith in religion and I have lost faith in science. I don't understand the theories of Messrs. Planck and Einstein, but I grasp enough to realize that the

world of matter may be a world of appearances—that even our own bodies are a part of this dance of electrons. What's behind it, we don't know. How does my mind act on my body when I decide to move my arm? Neither psychology nor physiology can tell me...

"By what trick could Faustina Crayle create the illusion of her double? And why? She gained nothing. It cost her a job. She may be an unconscious trickster—an hysteric with impulses to amaze and frighten people, impulses that she can't control because she is not aware of them herself. That might explain why she played such a trick, but not how.

"There is a third possibility. Suppose Faustina Crayle is...abnormal in a way that modern science will not acknowledge?"

If Mrs. Lightfoot feared an outburst of that outraged skepticism that is a sure sign of hidden credulity—the fool's fear of being fooled—she had misjudged her man. "Did anyone else see Miss Crayle's double? Besides two girls of thirteen and a maid of nineteen or twenty?"

Mrs. Lightfoot caught the implication. "There was one other witness—middle-aged, sober, reasonably shrewd and observant. Myself."

After a moment, she went on: "I had a dinner engagement outside the school that evening. I came out of my room about six. A pair of sconces are always lighted in the upper hall at that hour. Each has a hundred-watt bulb under a small shade. Their light extends to the first landing of the front stair. Below that landing the stair was in shadow this particular evening, for Arlene had neglected to turn on the ceiling light in the lower hall. I started down the stair with one hand on the balustrade, moving slowly because my dress had a long, full skirt. As I reached the first landing, someone, one in greater haste, brushed past me without a word of apology and I saw that it was Miss Crayle.

"She didn't actually jostle me, but I felt the drafty displacement of air that you feel when anyone passes closely and swiftly. And her ungloved hand brushed my arm where the skin was bare between my cuff and my glove. That contact was inhumanly cold. I remember thinking: *she must have been outdoors...* I didn't see her face as she passed. But I recognized her back—the brown hat and the blue covert coat,

the only outdoor clothes she had except a winter coat still in storage. I was irritated by her rudeness. Manners are important at Brereton. I raised my voice, making it crisp and peremptory: 'Miss Crayle!'

"'Yes, Mrs. Lightfoot?'

"Dr. Willing, that answering voice came from the upstairs hall, above me, and I could still see Miss Crayle's back moving into the shadows of the lower hall, below me. I looked up. Faustina Crayle was standing at the head of the stairs, in the full light of the upper hall, wearing the brown hat and blue coat. Her eyes, bright with life and intelligence, looked into mine, and she spoke again: "You called me, Mrs. Lightfoot?" I looked down. There was nothing in the lower hall then—nothing but shadows. I said: 'I thought you passed me just now on the stair. I didn't know you were just behind me.' She answered: 'That's rather odd. You were going down so slowly and I was in such a hurry to get the evening mail that my first impulse was to slip past you on the stair. But I didn't because I realized how rude that would be.'

"So she'd had the unrealized intention....I recalled how often a sleepwalker will carry out an intention previously suppressed in his waking state. Suppose that the uncensored, autonomous action of the unconscious mind in sleepwalking could be pushed a little further? Suppose that the unconscious mind could project some form of itself outside the body? Not a material form, but a visible one. Just as mirror-reflections and rainbows are visible and even photographable though materially neither one exists. Or suppose a case of split personality where the secondary personality gathers enough vital energy to project that sort of visible yet immaterial image of itself...

"I assure you it took all the nerve I had to go on down that stair into the darkness and turn on the light in the lower hall. There was no one—except Arlene coming into the drawing-room from the dining room. 'Did you meet anyone just now?' I asked her. She shook her head: 'No, ma'am. I haven't seen a soul.'"

"No wonder you didn't dare tell Faustina Crayle why you wished her to leave!" Basil's glance strayed to the lawn outside the window where the autumn breeze tumbled the dead leaves and pounced on them in erratic

starts and sallies like an invisible kitten.

"She would have thought me mad. Do you?"

"No. A conformist skepticism is a pretty cheap commodity. He who accepts the incredulities of his time without question is as naïve as he who accepts its credulities." Basil's eyes returned to Mrs. Lightfoot. "You spoke of a drafty sensation when the double passed. Any sound? Swish of air? Rustle of clothing?"

"No sound at all."

"Footfalls?"

"No, but that would be so in any case. The stair carpet is thick and soft."

"Every human body carries some faint odor or combination of odors," mused Basil. "Face powder, lipstick, hair tonic, permanent wave lotion, or shaving lotion. Iodine or some other medicine. The breath odors — food, wine, tobacco. And the clothing odors—mothballs, shoe polish, dry cleaning fluids, Russian leather, or Harris tweed. Finally there are those body odors the soap advertisements worry us about. You are one witness who was close enough to touch the double, however briefly. Did you notice any odor, however faint or fleeting?"

Mrs. Lightfoot shook her head emphatically. "There was no odor, Dr. Willing, unless I missed it."

"I doubt that." He glanced toward a row of flower pots on the window sill. "Only a woman with keen senses would enjoy a fragrance as delicate as rose geranium or lemon verbena."

Mrs. Lightfoot smiled. "I even use lemon verbena on my handkerchief. My one really gaudy vice, but a French firm puts out an essence of *verveine* I can't resist. It's supposed to be an after-shaving lotion for men, so I'm probably the only woman in the world who uses it."

"Did Miss Crayle use any perfume habitually?"

"Lavender. She always used it on her hair."

"No hint of lavender about the double?"

"No." Mrs. Lightfoot's smile became ironic. "You wouldn't expect a reflection in a mirror to have an odor, would you?"

Basil picked up his hat and driving gloves. "Why did this double of Miss Crayle appear only at Brereton? Didn't Miss Crayle teach at another school last year? A place in Virginia called Maidstone?"

Mrs. Lightfoot looked at

him grimly. "I hadn't meant to tell you. Mollie Maidstone is a friend of mine and I got the truth out of her a few days ago, under pledge of secrecy, but. . .Miss Crayle left Maidstone last year under precisely the same conditions that she is now leaving Brereton."

The apartment house stood between Lexington Avenue and the river. Basil passed through a door flanked by copper tubs planted with ivy to a self-service elevator and pressed the button marked Penthouse. In a vestibule on the top floor he lifted a knocker and chimes rang. The young woman who opened the door was tall for her sex, but slenderly fashioned with frail wrists and ankles, tapering hands and narrow, high-arched feet. Her hair was a pale tan, almost a biscuit color, so fine and soft that it had no shape or sleekness, but floated about her small head in a thistledown halo, stirring gently with each movement she made. The long face was sallow and earnest, the lips thin, the nose prominent and rather sharp. She led the way to a terrace. The sun had just set. Beyond the parapet the peaks and valleys of the mountainous city shimmered insubstantially in a silver haze.

Basil offered cigarettes. She shook her head impatiently. He lit one for himself. "Miss Crayle, do you know the German legend of the *doppelgänger?*"

Tears gathered in the cloudy blue eyes. She covered her face with her hands. "Dr. Willing, what am I going to do?"

"Then you do know. Why didn't you tell me before you sent me to Mrs. Lightfoot?"

"Would you have believed me? I don't know anything . . .except what people said about me at Maidstone." Her hands dropped. She turned toward him, apparently unconscious of reddened eyelids. "Now I suppose it's happened again at Brereton. Mrs. Lightfoot wouldn't tell me, but I thought she might tell you—a psychiatrist, working with the district attorney in New York. . ."

Basil told her all he had learned at Brereton. "Is that the sort of thing that happened at Maidstone?"

He caught a hint of lavender as Faustina dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief. "Pretty much. Maidstone is quite like Brereton. Only in Virginia instead of Massachusetts. The girls don't wear uniforms but it's strict in other ways. No male visitors

except Sunday and so on. After I'd been there a week I knew I was being watched and talked about. Other teachers refused my little invitations for tea or shopping. Even the servants waited on me grudgingly. I took it for hostility. Now I believe it was fear. In my fourth week I got a note from Miss Maidstone. Dismissal with a check for a year's services. I took the note to her study. She was quite emotional about the whole thing. She even wrote me a letter of recommendation. That got me the job at Brereton afterward. You see, though she had to keep it secret because of her school, Miss Maidstone has dabbled in psychic research. She took books out of a locked cupboard and read me about other 'doubles' that had been reported in various research societies in Europe. She didn't suspect me of fraud. For that very reason she would not keep me at Maidstone."

"Do you believe in this yourself?"

Faustina smiled bitterly. "I know I'm not a fraud. You don't know that, of course. But I do. And I can't see how or why anyone else should play such a trick on me. What remains? When you've lost your job twice because of a thing, you don't think it's just imagination... I'm like Madame du Deffand. I don't believe in it, but I'm afraid of it."

"Of what?"

"Of this...thing. Suppose I were to see it myself? I've had just one glimpse, on the front stair at Brereton. All I saw was the back of a figure, dressed in clothes like mine, brushing past Mrs. Lightfoot. That could be anyone who looked like me and wore similar clothes. Even if I were to see a face resembling mine, at a distance, in a dim light—that could be illusion or trickery, a face resembling mine by chance or made up deliberately to look like mine. But if I should suddenly come upon a face close at hand, in a clear light, and recognize it as my own face in every small detail—I believe I should die. Because that couldn't be faked."

"How often was the double seen at Maidstone?"

"Three times. On the front lawn while I was asleep upstairs. On an upstairs sleeping porch while I was teaching a class in a downstairs room. And once it passed an open door while I stood inside the door with another teacher."

Basil crushed the stub of

his cigarette in an ashtray. "Miss Crayle, is there anyone who has reason to hate you? Or who would benefit by your death?"

"No one I know of. I have no family. My mother died when I was six and I don't remember my father."

"Any property?"

"A small cottage at Seabright on the Jersey coast, left to me by my mother. And some jewelry. Just trinkets, I suppose, for my mother was not a wealthy woman. Mr. Watkins, the lawyer, is going to have it appraised for me."

"Who gets the jewelry and the cottage when you die?"

"I'm leaving the cottage to a school friend. I'm not supposed to inherit the jewelry until my thirtieth birthday."

"What becomes of the jewelry if you die before then?"

"I really don't recall." The colorless brows knitted. "There was something in the will about that."

"Better give me the name and address of your lawyer . . .Septimus Watkins? He manages half the big trust funds in New York." Basil rose to go. "Are you staying here long?"

"I'm leaving this evening. The friends who live here will be back tonight. They just lent me the place for this weekend. I need rest. And privacy. So I thought I'd go down to the cottage at Seabright."

"Don't." Basil looked up sharply. "Go to a hotel. The biggest, brightest, noisiest hotel you can find. And let me know where you are as soon as you're settled. . . ."

When Basil arrived, Septimus Watkins was just leaving his office. He laid hat and gloves and silver-topped malacca stick back on his desk and sat down without removing his topcoat. While Basil was talking, Watkins's bleak glance traveled toward the window view of Old Trinity, dark and dwarfish among higher buildings. "The whole business sounds like adolescent humor to me."

"Who inherits the jewelry if Miss Crayle dies before thirty?"

"Dr. Willing, I know your reputation. I believe you'll be discreet. So I'll tell you as much as I can. For that is the quickest way to disabuse your mind of the preposterous idea that anything threatens Miss Crayle. That unfortunate girl, Faustina, is illegitimate." Watkins's small, close smile seemed to savor the lubricities of the past, safely sterilized by time. "Did you ever hear of Rosa

Diamond? She was the daughter of a man who wrote hymns and lived in Philadelphia. She had red hair. In the nineties she ran away from home—first New York, then Paris. There she became a star of the *demimonde*—one of those fabulous courtesans Balzac describes in such rich detail. A provincial American girl, she learned from her lovers to speak and write perfect French, to understand music and art and letters. It's hard to make your generation understand such hetaerae. Only Paris and Athens in certain periods have produced them."

"Wasn't she co-respondent in a divorce case of the 1900's?"

"In 1912. A corporation lawyer of New York wanted a divorce without accusing his wife. Rosa Diamond was so notorious that he had only to go to Paris and be seen once, driving in the Bois with her in an open carriage, to obtain his divorce. That single drive was considered adequate proof of adultery. It was said that he paid Rosa Diamond a thousand dollars and that they parted at her door without his even kissing her fingertips. But they met again and...Faustina Crayle is their daughter. Rosa knew her trade. She was to have been simply a convenience. Instead she altered the whole course of his life. He fell in love with her..."

Again came the little smile of reminiscent salacity. "He brought her back to America. He gave her a town house in Manhattan and a seaside cottage in New Jersey at Seabright. But he didn't marry her. Such men didn't marry such women in those days."

"And that is the origin of that meagre, bloodless girl!" Basil thought of the flat chest, the narrow flanks. "Does she know?"

"I've tried to keep it from her, as her parents wished. Several times she has asked me if she were illegitimate. I lied, but I'm afraid she didn't believe me.... It was in 1918 when Rosa was forty-three that she gave birth to Faustina. The father already had a legitimate heir by his divorced wife. He was in his fifties then and knew he had not long to live—a heart condition which Faustina has inherited. He wanted to provide for the little girl without unpleasant publicity which might affect her future. To avoid mentioning Rosa or Faustina in his will, he gave Rosa a collection of handsome jewels which had belonged to his mother. There

was another fund to put Faustina through school, but the jewels—sold at a fair price, with the proceeds invested judiciously — would give her a tidy income for life—say, ten thousand a year in 1918 and even more today. The value of Faustina's jewels has appreciated in the last thirty years, while, unhappily, the crash of 1929 wiped out the fortune left to the legitimate heir. That young man shot himself leaving two minor heirs, legitimate grandchildren of Faustina's father, who have less money than she today."

"But if Faustina dies before the age of thirty, the jewels revert to these children of her natural half-brother?"

"There was some bad feeling when the grandfather gave family jewels to Rosa Diamond and she developed a sense of guilt about it. According to her will, Faustina inherits the jewels at thirty but if Faustina dies before thirty, I, as executor, must dispose of the jewels according to instructions in a sealed envelope deposited with me, which can be opened only after Faustina's death and in the presence of a probate judge. Rosa herself told me this envelope contains instructions to give the jewels to the legitimate heirs. The sealed envelope was a device she contrived so that her will could be read to Faustina without Faustina learning the name of her natural half-brother or suspecting their relationship. That name I cannot reveal, even to you, Dr. Willing. It would betray a trust to revive such an old, unhappy scandal."

"Do the legitimate heirs know about Rosa's will and the sealed instructions?"

"Naturally. The family knew from the beginning what had become of their jewels. When they asked me if there was any legal way to recover the jewels, I convinced them there was not, by explaining exactly what disposition Rosa had made of them."

"Did you mention Faustina Crayle by name?"

"I believe I did. Why not?"

Wearily, Basil rose to take his leave. "Tell me one more thing: has either of these legitimate heirs any connection with the Maidstone School? Or Brereton?"

"I must decline to answer that."

It was full night when Basil reached the narrow brownstone house on lower Park Avenue where he had

lived so many years. Before the war he had regarded it as a poor substitute for his father's home in Baltimore. Now, after years overseas, this was his home and always would be. He loved the river of cars flowing uptown at office-closing-time, the soft bloom of curtained lamplight in the low, oldfashioned houses on either side of the wide street, the glitter of the Grand Central building against velvety blue darkness, the whisper of tires, the ring of heels and the nip of frost in the air which announced winter and a new season of gaiety.

Juniper met him in the vestibule. "Some folks waitin' in the library."

Basil went up a flight of stairs to the long, white-paneled "library" that was also living-room and study. Juniper had drawn wine-colored curtains and lighted lamps. At the sound of Basil's step a young man turned swiftly toward the door. The lamplight found golden highlights in the ash-blond hair, cut close to his small head. "Dr. Willing? Forgive this intrusion, but the matter is urgent. I am Raymond Vining, Barbara's brother. It was Mrs. Lightfoot who suggested that we should see you. This is Dr. Willing—Mrs. Chase, Diana's mother. And my *fiancée,* Miss Aitchison."

The women were shadows beyond the lamplight. Basil pressed the chandelier switch. Mrs. Chase had kept the tilted nose, chubby cheeks, and rounded chin of youth, but there were deep lines scored on either side of the mouth. The bright, reddish brown hair was as patently artificial as the tomato-red of her lips. She was dressed with ostentation—dark mink, black velvet, and diamonds. Miss Aitchison was a ripe beauty of eighteen or twenty with splendid dark eyes, golden skin, and fruity, red lips, set off by a neat brown suit and a vivid scarf of burnt orange. Basil paused as he caught the ghost of a familiar fragrance—lemon verbena. But he could not tell which of the three had brought it into the room.

"Do you think I should withdraw Diana from the school?" demanded Mrs. Chase.

"I can't advise you about that." Basil realized she was the sort of woman who tries to unload any responsibility on the nearest man.

"At least you can tell us what has been happening there!"

"All sorts of odd things

happen at schools," drawled Miss Aitchinson insolently, her legs crossed, a cigarette smoking in one gloved hand.

Basil seized the opening. "You went to Brereton?"

"No, I'm Maidstone and—"

Raymond Vining interrupted. "Dr. Willing, just what did happen? Was it hysteria? Or fraud?"

Basil turned to look at Vining. He had Barbara's fresh pink and white skin, and her eyes, the misty blue of star sapphires. He had her lips—the line so subtly turned that even in repose it seemed to quiver on the edge of laughter. He had the attenuated face and figure Victorian novelists called "aristocratic." Basil had seen the same traits too often in the families of farmers and factory workers to accept the odd biological belief that the human bone structure can be altered in a few generations by property and leisure.

"Was Miss Crayle an agent?" went on Vining. "Or a victim?"

Basil took a book from his shelves. "Here is something that is supposed to have happened in Livonia in 1845. It's been published in various versions by Robert Dale Owen, by Aksakoff, by Flammarion." He began to read aloud. It was almost the same story as Faustina's. Only the girl's school was at Volmar, fifty-eight miles from Riga, and the girl was a French teacher from Dijon, Emilie Sagée, fair, gentle, aged thirty-two. Two identical figures were seen simultaneously by an embroidery class of forty-two girls—one appearing for several minutes in a chair in the classroom while the other could be seen gathering flowers in the garden outside the window. As long as the appearance remained in the chair, the girl outside moved "slowly and heavily like a person overcome with fatigue." There were other appearances, even more curious, until finally all but twelve of the forty-three girls were withdrawn by their parents and Mademoiselle Sagée was dismissed. She wept and cried: "This is the nineteenth time since my sixteenth year that I have lost a position because of this!" From that moment, when she walked out of the Neuwelcke School, she vanished from history. What became of her, no one knows. But in 1895 Flammarion looked at the birth records in Dijon for 1813—the year of Mademoiselle Sagée's birth if she were thirty-two in 1845. There was no Sagée. But on January 13, 1813, an infant girl named Octavie Saget was

born and, of course, Saget is pronounced precisely the same as Sagée in French. In the record after that name appeared the significant word: *illegitimate.*

"There is one striking point about all this," concluded Basil. "The exact parallel between the two cases. In some details the Crayle case is a plagiarism of the Sagée case."

"Except for the illegitimacy," murmured Vining.

"So what?" said Miss Aitchinson rudely.

"Someone who wishes to injure Miss Crayle has read the story of Mademoiselle Sagée and adapted it to that purpose. But that isn't the worst. According to tradition, she who sees her own double must die. Miss Crayle lives in fear of seeing the figure herself. This haunting by a double is a constant threat of death to her—psychologically on the same plane as threatening, anonymous letters. It could end in insanity, suicide —even murder."

"How could anyone fake the thing?" cried Vining. "Mirrors?"

"Not when Miss Crayle was painting on the lawn and the double was sitting in an armchair inside the house."

"Alice..." Vining turned to Miss Aitchison. "I'm going to take Barbara out of that school. Wouldn't you?"

"I suppose so." Miss Aitchison looked bored.

"You're right!" Mrs. Chase would always join the majority with enthusiasm. "I'm going to take Diana away the first thing tomorrow..."

After dinner Basil called Assistant Chief Inspector Foyle at his Flatbush home. "Nothing we can do tonight," said Foyle, when Basil had outlined facts and conjectures. "You told her to go to a big hotel. Couldn't be any hocus-pocus there. Tomorrow I'll see this Watkins character at his office. If I busted in on his home tonight, it would be twice as difficult..."

It was six forty-five a.m. when the telephone rang beside the bed. "Dr. Willing?" Mrs. Lightfoot's voice roused him. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but a policeman just called me from New Jersey. Faustina Crayle is dead."

Basil met an early train from Massachusetts at Grand Central and took Mrs. Lightfoot to breakfast in the station. Then he drove her to Centre Street.

"After you phoned this morning I got what dope I

could from the New Jersey State Police," said Foyle to Basil. "No evidence of suicide —let alone murder. Not even accident. Just natural death from heart failure. You told me yourself Watkins said her heart was weak."

"I wonder how many people he told. . ." muttered Basil.

"She didn't go to a hotel," added Foyle. "Her friends at the penthouse say Miss Crayle got a phone call that changed her mind about that. She went down to this seaside cottage she's inherited. Her body could have lain there for weeks if the caretaker hadn't happened to pass the house around three a.m., coming home from a covered-dish supper at the church there. She saw a light and notified the state police. They found the front door ajar, Miss Crayle's key still in the lock outside, and her key-ring dangling. Just one light inside—a lamp in the hall. There's a couple of little parlors to the right of the hall with a pair of transparent glass doors between. Miss Crayle was lying prone in the middle of the first parlor, her head toward the glass doors, still wearing hat, coat and gloves, her purse and dressing-case beside her. Nothing in the room disarranged. No money taken. The Jersey cops found a taxi-driver who drove her from the station to the cottage and left her there around eleven fifty. The doctor says she must have been dead by midnight at the latest.

"It's plain what happened. She unlocked the door and left it ajar with her key in the lock while she stepped inside to switch on a few lights. What every woman does when she enters an empty house alone at night. Before she got any farther than the first parlor, her heart just stopped."

"Did you check alibis?" asked Basil.

"Oh, sure. Mrs. Chase was with a supper party from eleven p.m. to three thirty a.m. Miss Aitchison and Vining were at the Crane Club. Bartender remembers their coming in together at ten p.m. and leaving together at one thirty a.m."

"Anything else?"

"Well. . ." Foyle hesitated. "It's pretty silly. You know how superstitious hayseeds are. One of the yokels down at this place, Seabright, declares he passed Faustina Crayle walking along a backroad at three thirty a.m. He didn't know it when he testified, but that was after the

cops had found her dead body. . . ."

In the car Basil glanced at Mrs. Lightfoot. "I'm going to Seabright."

"May I go with you? I'm beginning to feel responsible for Miss Crayle. If I hadn't turned her out so summarily. . ."

Mis Crayle's cottage was three miles beyond the village, between pinewoods and sea — white clap-boarding with shutters and door of grayish green. Though the road was unfrequented, Russian olive, bayberry, and scrub pine had been cultivated to mask the windows. A ragged lawn sloped up to the crest of a dune covered with poverty grass. There was no one in sight but the front door was unlatched. "Would police be so careless?" murmured Basil.

Mrs. Lightfoot followed him inside reluctantly. "Dr. Willing, could a. . .a double survive the death of the personality that projected it? Even for a few hours?"

He wasn't listening. He was looking at the hall— white woodwork, white wallpaper flecked with green. A lamp stood on a telephone table in the curve of the stair. Basil examined the bulb — one hundred watts. The only light in the hall. It would illuminate the hall itself brilliantly, but the light would be low, ceiling and upper wall remaining in shadow. Some radiance would spill through the wide archway into the parlor on the right but it would still be low, and the second parlor, beyond the transparent glass doors, would be lost in shadows. Basil stepped into the first parlor. He pressed a light switch beside the archway. No light came. The bulbs in the ceiling fixture looked smoky. Probably dead.

The second parlor could be reached only by way of the first. The two were almost exactly alike. Each had white woodwork and a bay window at the far end with frilly, white curtains and green upholstered seat. Each had a rug of faded-rose color, slipcovers splashed with roses the same shade, and leaves of faded green. Only close inspection showed a difference in such details as the color of ashtrays and the arrangement of chairs.

"Monotonous," said Basil. "Two rooms in the same colors."

"It would be worse if they were decorated in contrasting colors," retorted Mrs. Lightfoot. "That would make both rooms look smaller by divid-

ing them. Just as a woman in contrasting blouse and skirt looks shorter than a woman in a dress all one color. This way the eye travels from one room to the other without a break and you get the effect of one long room even with the glass doors closed."

"Why doors at all? Why not one big room?"

Mrs. Lightfoot glanced about her. "There's no radiator. Probably no furnace in a summer cottage like this. But with the glass doors closed, this first parlor is small enough to be heated by a portable stove, electric or oil."

Basil walked down the room to the glass doors. "What do you make of these marks?" They were minute scratches on the wooden frames that separated each small transparent glass pane from the others.

"It's hard to paint the wooden frames without smearing the glass," suggested Mrs. Lightfoot. "Amateur painters often cut a piece of cardboard the same size as the pane and fit it inside the frame over the glass while they're painting. Afterward you have to pry out the cardboard. This painter seems to have used a needle."

"It wasn't a painter. Those scratches were made after the paint was dry and—"

"What's that?" exclaimed Mrs. Lightfoot. "It sounds like footfalls upstairs!"

"It is," agreed Basil calmly. "I've been listening to them for some time."

The footfalls were coming downstairs. There was no attempt at stealth. The heels rang clear and unafraid on each step. Then came a sudden pause. Basil visualized a figure arrested in motion by sight of the front door, which he had left wide open. The footfalls resumed with a certain caution. In the hall archway appeared the large, formidable figure of Septimus Watkins.

"Dr. Willing!" Surprise seemed to master indignation. "I trust you've learned enough from the local police to accept as I do their statement that Miss Crayle's death was perfectly natural. As I mentioned yesterday, her heart—" His voice wavered, stopped. All three listened to the sound of other footfalls —younger, fleeter—running down the stair.

"So you didn't come alone?" Basil moved toward the arch. The footfalls ceased as abruptly as they had begun. Basil was the first to speak. "I'm glad Alice Aitch-

ison told me she went to Maidstone."

Raymond Vining moved forward. With him came a faint scent of lemon verbena. "What has that to do with. . .?"

"Your murdering your grandfather's illegitimate daughter, Faustina Crayle? Everything."

"Don't say a word, Ray!" called Watkins. "I'll get you the best criminal lawyer money can buy!"

Basil spoke as if thinking aloud. "Alice Aitchison must have known or guessed the truth. Enough to charge her as accessory? Probably, since, as your wife, she would share the money you got from the sale of Faustina's jewels when you received them. And Barbara? She's only thirteen, but she's intelligent. She may have guessed—"

"No!" Vining shouted. "Alice didn't know and neither did Barbara! You can charge me but you can't charge them! I won't let you!"

"Why, that's a confession!" gasped Mrs. Lightfoot.

Not until the drive back to New York did Basil have a chance to give her the details: "I suspected Vining the moment I saw his close family resemblance to Faustina, his grandfather's daughter. He was the only person involved who was physically able to impersonate her double, even under favorable conditions. Both Vining and Faustina had the attenuated 'aristocratic' figure—narrow flanks, finely cut wrists and ankles, tapering hands, slender, high-arched feet. In woman's dress, his figure would look like hers. And in a dim light at a fair distance his face could pass for hers. Both had the 'aristocratic' small head and long, oval face, the prominent nose and thin lips. Both were the ash-blond type, with cloudy blue eyes like star sapphires. Rachel face powder would make Vining's fresh pink skin as sallow as Faustina's. He was actor enough to subdue the mocking expression of his lips to Faustina's look of wistful seriousness. Especially when his face was shaded by a wide hatbrim.

"He discovered the resemblance when Alice Aitchison was at Maidstone a year ago. He wanted to break the strict rule against male visitors on any day but Sunday. He was in love and he wanted to visit her at any time of day or night he pleased. So he used a trick as old as pagan Rome. Remember how the intrusion of young Clodius, dressed as

a woman, at a ceremony designed for women only, caused Caesar to divorce the wife that wasn't above suspicion? Like Clodius, Vining was young, slight, beardless. He could pass as one girl among many girls if he wore a girl's clothing and kept at a distance from others in a dim light. But he didn't pass as one girl among many. He was mistaken for a particular girl —one of the young teachers, Faustina Crayle. Miss Maidstone kept her books on psychic research under lock and key, but they were there. Trust some of the girls to get hold of the key and read about the *doppelgänger* myth. Stories of a mysterious 'double' began to crystallize around Faustina. Alice Aitchison would report the fact to Vining with great glee for she would have noticed his resemblance to Faustina and she would realize how the stories had started. But Vining himself would know why that resemblance existed. Thanks to Watkins, he knew all there was to know about his grandfather's natural daughter and he was in a position to recognize that rather unusual name— Faustina Crayle. He made a point of seeing Faustina for himself. He saw how strong the family resemblance was though the difference in sex, and therefore in dress, made it unapparent to the casual observer. All this gave him the idea for a unique method of murder that would not leave any mark on Faustina's body or even require his presence at the moment of her death.

"When she went to Brereton, he sent his little sister Barbara to the same school as an unconscious spy, reporting to him quite innocently all that went on inside the school. The front and back stairs and the French windows at Brereton made it fairly easy for him to slip in and out of the building, especially when most people who saw him at a distance mistook him for Faustina who had a right there. For his more startling effects he chose his witnesses carefully —a stupid, suggestible young servant and two flighty little girls of thirteen, one his own sister who wouldn't give him away if she ever guessed the truth. I think his meeting with you on the stair was accident. You were too shrewd an observer for him to seek you deliberately. But there were bound to be some accidents. He made the best of that one, slipping through the drawing-room and out a French window, just before

Arlene came in from the dining room. He let his hand brush your arm purposely because he knew his hand was icy cold—he had just come in from outside—and he knew that coldness would be almost as effective as the filmy, unreal texture of the Sage double's touch which he couldn't imitate. At Brereton he appeared in a coat and hat copied exactly from Faustina's and reproduced one striking incident from the case of Emilie Sagée—slow motions during the appearance of her double. Presumably he did this by drugging something Faustina ate or drank, timed to affect her the moment he appeared as her double.

"No wonder Faustina herself came to believe in the double and fear it. That was how he killed her—with her own fear. He knew the plan of the Seabright cottage—it had belonged to his grandfather. He knew about the two parlors which were the same size and shape, with bay windows facing each other at opposite ends, and the pair of glass doors between the two rooms. Watkins could tell him they were still decorated in the same colors. The rest was simple. He went down to Seabright in Faustina's absence. He obtained mirrors the same size and shape as the panes of glass in the pair of doors and fitted a mirror over each pane, inside the wooden frame. He put dead bulbs in the ceiling fixture of the first parlor. That was all. Except the telephone call to Faustina last night. He would introduce himself as one of the mysterious family she had wondered about for so long and make an appointment to meet her at her own house that same night. He could tell her things about Watkins and her mother that would make his identification convincing. Then he went off to the Crane Club with Alice Aitchison to establish an alibi.

"At eleven fifty Faustina let herself into the dark, empty cottage with a latchkey, leaving it in the door while she snapped on the hall light. It was chance that she stepped into the first parlor next. But she was bound to enter it sooner or later that evening and when she did—only one thing could happen. She would press the ceiling switch beside the hall archway. No light would come on since the bulbs were dead. A movement would draw her eyes to the pair of doors, now mirrored. Whose movement? Her own, reflected

there. *But she wouldn't know it was a reflection!* She would believe with absolute conviction that there was transparent glass in those doors and that she was looking *through* it. There was nothing to tell her in that first, swift glance that she was looking at the first parlor reflected in a mirror, instead of the second parlor viewed through glass—remember, both rooms were alike in shape and color and the low, irregular light from the single lamp in the hall was deceptive by the time it reached the mirrors in the pair of doors.

"You see what happened? *Faustina's own reflection killed her!* She had a weak heart. For over a year her mind had been subjected to intensive psychological preparation for belief in the *doppelgänger*. As she said: *when you've lost your job twice because of a thing, you don't think it's just imagination.* She toppled face down, frightened to death by the oldest, the simplest of all illusions—her own reflection. She lay dead of terror when there was nothing to terrify anyone—merely a mirror imaging the prone body of a dead girl.

"Vining had to remove the mirrors before the body was found. He went down to Seabright to do that after he'd given Faustina ample time to die. He wore woman's dress for the last time. He might not have been seen at all. As it happened he was seen and mistaken once again for Faustina. When the police checked the time and found 'Fuastina' had been 'seen' after she was dead, only one thing could happen. The story of Faustina's double became the story of Faustina's ghost and the police would write the whole thing off as village supersition.

"As Faustina's double, Vining tricked the eye adroitly. No doubt he wore rubber-soled shoes to trick the ear as well, for the double never made a sound. His cold hand even tricked your sense of touch. But there was one grosser, more primordial sense he didn't trick—smell."

"But the double had no odor at all!" objected Mrs. Lightfoot.

"That's the point. Every human body has some odor. Yet you said the double had none. Did that mean it really was inhuman? Or was there some condition that would make one body seem odorless to another? There is just one such condition: when two bodies have the same odor—for example,

when they are both using the same perfume. A non-smoker kissing a smoker is keenly aware of nicotine fumes. Two smokers kissing will each believe the other has a clean breath because neither detects the odor.

"You used lemon verbena. So I knew, after my first talk with you, that *Faustina's double was someone who also used lemon verbena.* Any other odor you would have noticed—except your own. Faustina herself used lavender water. You told me so and I noticed it when I was with her. So the double couldn't be Faustina herself. That narrowed my search considerably. I wanted someone who looked like Faustina, someone who used lemon verbena, someone who had connections with both Maidstone and Brereton, someone who had a motive for injuring or destroying Faustina. Vining alone met all those conditions. When I entered my own library last night I caught a hint of lemon verbena. I wasn't sure which of the three was using it—Mrs. Chase, Miss Aitchison, or Vining. But Vining was the most likely since he was the only man among them and you had told me it was a man's lotion. Today, the moment he came downstairs, I noticed it again. I suppose lemon verbena was such an ingrained habit with him that he forgot to suppress it when he was impersonating the double."

"You've solved the mystery of Faustina Crayle," said Mrs. Lightfoot. "But what about the mystery of Emilie Sagée?"

Basil slowed for a sharp curve, then accelerated. "That is a mystery that we must always see through a glass, darkly..."

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All Brand New Adventures of Simon Templar

death comes to chuchu valente

by Leighla Whipper

When Miss Bennett saw the large slick-papered fashion magazine folded neatly in her mailbox, she knew she had another job. A flicker of interest flared briefly as she took the self-service elevator to her fourteenth floor apartment.

It was always soothing to the spirit to walk into her oasis from the noisy New York streets. For oasis it was, with its muted music, cool colors in which the walls ceilings and floor blended into a perfectly keyed background for her private world. The five rooms were soundproofed, airconditioned, carpeted from wall to wall, and furnished with the custom built pieces she had ordered from various parts of the world. And in addition, it was accoustically adjusted to the tone of her concert grand piano.

Small wonder that when she drew off her gloves and sank on the down cushions of a sofa, she felt completely at

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SM readers will remember Leighla Whipper's earlier stories about Heather Bennett, that rather formidable professional, who saw a side of Saratoga Springs which James Bond never knew (or cared to know) in IN SPITE OF THE DEVIL (SM, Oct. 1966.) Miss Bennett now finds it necessary, in connection with her work, to go to Mexico—a country the author knows and loves—in the best Heather Bennett story we have brought you. H.S.S.

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ease. Not even the prospect of the new job waiting moved her, since for five years, she had always been ready to transfer herself to any part of the world, to fit into any milieu, and of course to take the inevitable chances which her job always demanded.

She was thirty-five, dressed by the master, Balenciaga, and had been a professional at make-up for several years. It might have been possible for her to have been considered attractive or even pretty had not her face been devoid of expression most of the time. There were times when she smiled, and rarer occasions when she had been known to laugh, but those of her ever changing employers always noted that her eyes remained completely blank.

She slowly turned the pages of Vogue—pausing as she usually did to evaluate the details of the various gowns. She scanned the captions, humming a small tune with the bossa nova now playing. There it was, the address printed, this time, on page 64. It was very simple.

HOTEL PRESIDENTE
MEXICO CITY

She poured herself a brandy from a crystal decanter. How convenient. She could brush up on her Spanish and there were several hand embroidered blouses she had forgotten to pick up down that way when she was in Briseña, a neighboring country.

There are many facets to the art of being a professional assassin, and Miss Bennett knew them all. She scorned the fanatic, the publicity seeker, the mass murderers, the sneaky family prisoners, the various un-sporting forms of murder which were daily to be read of in the press. Her art was clean cut—difficult, but simple. She had perfect aim and no nerves an unbeatable combination in her profession.

Two days later she was registering at the indicated hotel in Mexico City.

"We've put in the piano and the high fidelity, Miss Bennett," the clerk told her. "I think you'll find the suite completely set to your specifications."

She thanked him and the two bellboys assumed the burden of her ten bags. It was beautiful, and they had thought of everything—the piano, the flowers, the music—the ten-story view. She supplied the rest. One of her bags contained her special pillows, others held her flow-

ered sheets and comforter, and her electric blanket.

When she faced her new employer the next day, she noted that he reacted in the same way most of her employers did. He was surprised. He did not believe her capable of the job. He obviously thought she would have been more at home sitting at one of the Paris showings of Chanel or Cardin. She was accustomed to all that and knew that the only way to combat these silly prejudices was to invite him to half an hour's target practice.

She studied him, noting that he was still a handsome man at fifty or thereabout. But there was something in his figure and carriage which was unmistakable. The direct gaze of his green eyes was something the years had failed to diminish.

"Shall I speak in English or Spanish?" he asked her.

"Either," she replied, refusing his offered cigarette and lighting one of her own.

"I appreciate your coming," he began in Spanish, "and I hope we won't put you to too much trouble. But first, before I outline the work to be done, I want to point out to you all the disadvantages."

She looked at him with surprise. This was the first time a "client" had brought up this point—the disadvantages! How amusing. The one big "disadvantage" of course was risking her neck . . .or with no capital punishment in this country, the rest of her life in the penitentiary which was considerably worse. Although it was quite true she actually did not care whether she lived or died—the manner of her death was of the utmost importance to her. She had a horror of being caught and punished by the law of any country. All this, of course stemmed from her studied and systematic one-woman reaction against the miscarriage of justice in her own country.

A senseless and unmotivated crime—by persons unknown. . .

She caught herself and by main force focussed her eyes on the man in front of her. He was still studying her carefully.

"Yes?" she said softly—"the disadvantages?"

He too hesitated. "I don't want to offend you," he said slowly, "but you're a woman. This work is—well—serious. You run a great risk, and if you're caught, there's really nothing we can do for you beside bring you some of the comforts of life in prison."

She smiled. "Mr. Garcia," she said. "May I allay your fears?"

He politely avoided her eyes and she read his mind expertly.

"First, let me assure you I'm a professional. There's no question of failing, and femininity does not enter into the picture. If anything, it has been my greatest asset."

She noted the newly appraising look he gave her, but his manner was still guarded.

"You asked my organization to send the best person for this job, and at the risk of seeming immodest, I'm afraid I'm the best."

She paused for a bit of theatrical effect. "Naturally," she continued, "I can't give you my resumé for the same professionalism I just mentioned, but let us say I have never, never failed. I have dead aim."

In spite of himself, Juan Montero de la Peña shuddered. His name, naturally, was not Garcia.

"If you will see to the minimum requirements of the affair, I can take perfect care of myself. I have had experience."

Again Juan felt the impact of her words—of the *authenticity* of her words. What a strange woman. In all his life which had included women of many stamps and nationalities and which still had its share, he had never known any like her. There she was dressed in something like seafoam—it was really a little chiffon bagatelle done especially for her by Mr. Gerard in his spare time from his popular hairdressing salon—sitting there on the white brocade couch with her fingers curled around a thin glass of something from a curious bottle which she had not bothered to offer him. And she spoke of dead aim, and she was for real.

Thirst and curiosity assailed him at the same moment.

"You must excuse me," she said reading his mind again and pouring him a brandy. "I thought you might still be in training."

He looked sharply at her, paling a little. Was this woman a witch? She gave him the glass and he sipped what was the most delightful brandy he had ever remembered tasting.

"It took me a little while to recognize you," she continued. "You're still well-known to real aficionados. You're giving your farewell appearances in the provinces

now, aren't you?"

He flinched.

"Although matadors look entirely different without their 'traje de luces', I recognized you. I always enjoyed your cape work in the first third of the faena."

He shrugged with fatalism. "Thank you. I guess I'm too well known to play 'Mr. Garcia' any more."

"Not to anyone else. It's just that I manage to keep abreast of things in the fiesta brava and on some of the race tracks."

His tension disappeared with his third sip of brandy. "I'm sorry to have doubted you," he told her. "I should have known it would be all right. It took me so much time to make contact with your organization. I should have known they'd send me the best."

"Of course," she said trying to avoid what she now anticipated.

She wanted only the general picture and the briefing of when or how with the attendant possibilities or impossibilities; but with the inevitability of sunrise, he launched into all the motivating details of the job. This was usually her hardest moment.

"It isn't for myself, not for all my companions who couldn't pay. . ." he began.

She steeled herself and concentrated on the music which had been playing in the background.

"Of course I've had this feud with him ever since we had that disagreement in that night club fifteen years ago."

She pretended interest. "Disagreement in a club?"

"Yes. I suppose I'd been drinking a little. After all, one must break the kind of life we lead. When we're in training, it's like being a monk. Well, it was my wedding anniversary, and I was there with my wife and a few friends, and he was at the next table."

"He?" she asked patiently.

"Oh, yes, you know—Chuchu Valente!"

This gave Miss Bennett a slight pause. She knew the name very well. For many years this man had been one of the top bullfight announcers and critics in the capital. Besides, he had two radio programs a week in which he commented on the art as well as his television show.

"So it's to be Chuchu Valente," she mused. Strange that she was to be an instrument of his death. She had heard him and had seen him enter the plaza many times on her visits to the city.

"Yes!" Juan's tone changed. "And it's high time too."

She listened.

"You see, there're two ways to give the news—two ways to announce the faenas — two ways to give information to the public—two ways to present the truth!"

"Of course," she agreed, "but I never thought this applied to the bullfight."

"Nobody thinks so," he replied bitterly. But ask any of my friends—my colleagues. They've had to pay him for years, each time they fight in Plaza Azteca."

"I've paid him plenty too in my time just not to give me the kiss of death. But one night as I just mentioned, I was in this club, and he asked me for money from my last corrida. Somehow it hit me wrong—I blew up. There was this fat goat getting paid to stand safely behind the press barrier and talk into a microphone, and here was I out there exposing my life to the bull, the big bulls. Now I had to pay him to talk 'favorably' about me! I exploded. I grabbed him by the collar and told him off. He himself paid the other press to hush the thing up, and since then, he's never had a kind word to say about me."

His eyes kindled as he paused to light a cigarette. Miss Bennett knew that by simply waiting, she would be able to end the interview more quickly and get to her waiting book.

"You probably think I'm vindictive about all this," he continued heatedly,. . .but I'm not. I've finished my career. I'm giving my farewell fights now and I've only got three more left. I've saved enough money. It's for my son and for the fiesta brava here in Mexico!"

"I see," she murmured.

"You don't see at all! All you see is three matadors out there in their suit of lights making certain passes and killing well or killing badly. All you know about it is the 'Ole's' if its good or the jeers if it goes badly. You don't know anything about how they get to fight in the best plazas in the first place—how many are kept from succeeding—all the dirty politics behind it all. It takes much more than 'art' to be a bullfighter here. There's always the damned politics, and recently—the monopoly!"

"Oh, I see," she said, interested in spite of herself.

"And the favoritism. . .and the blackmail!"

As if on cue, the hi-fidelity began a pasadoble, the familiar "Virgin of Macarena."

"Now that's what I'm doing it for!" he almost shouted, referring to the music. "This man is distorting and twisting the whole art. He's talking 'up' mediocre matadors who are his friends, and talking 'down' the more artistic and valiant ones."

"And the really famous ones?"

"He can't do much about them. He doesn't ask them to pay—wouldn't dare. But there are only a handful of those. The majority have to struggle every moment of their professional lives. Their next contracts depend literally on whether they were good or bad in their last fight—or whether the public *thinks* they were. And this man is getting a strangle hold on everything. He's a power with his television and radio shows and then he's completely protected by the one man who controls every major plaza here in Mexico!"

"I think I understand."

"So now I say, he's distorting the whole business, the whole art. He's making the rules and very few people realize it who can do anything about it!"

"But if he goes, won't there be another like him?" she asked.

Juan gave her a long look. "There can never be another like him," he told her through set teeth. "He's got all the vices. You've only got to watch him on his TV show. Tonight, incidentally."

"It doesn't really matter for my work—all I want to know is just a little of his routine. I think it will be very simple—"

But Juan Montero wasn't listening. He consulted his watch. "Only twenty minutes from now his show comes on," he said as if there were no question about their watching it.

She wanted to tell him that cold blood was much better for her—that an emotionless calculating approach to her work always led to the best results, but she knew it was useless. She poured two more brandies. She resigned herself.

He hadn't lied. Never had she seen more false humility on the television screen. That was the problem which many important politicians had found with television. It searched the very soul with its close-ups. She was reminded of an important presidential election which had been lost by a favored candidate because of the penetrating television cameras.

On this program, the honored guest was the top matador of Mexico. Chuchu fawn-

ed upon him. Next came film clips of his last appearance in Plaza Azteca, accompanied by the sound of Chuchu's commentary in which he reached paeans of descriptive praise.

The next part was the appearance and interview of an eighty-five year old woman who had never missed a bullfight in fifty years. She was toothless and obviously poor, yet with a certain dignity in her direct and unfaltering answers to Chuchu who now, with an arm casually thrown around her shoulders was speaking in an easy patronizing tone, often asking her questions and answering them before she could do so. At the end of the program, Chuchu smiled with what was designed to be a self-effacing, but captivating smile, but which ended as a smirk since his eyes were darting in another direction at the same time. He bowed very low from the waist and rubbed his hands together as the scene faded and a sexy beer commercial came on.

Turning off the sight of twenty gorgeous blondes drinking beer in various poses, Juan Montero turned triumphantly to her.

"Now you see?" he demanded.

"I believed you from the first, Señor Montero," she answered, "but all this doesn't matter to me. I'm going to give you a good job. But if I *hadn't* believed you before, I'd believe you now —after that program."

His eyes reflected her sympathy, "And I haven't told you the worst. . .his personal life—"

"Please," she held up a detaining hand. "Please don't tell me more. You see, it will spoil my work if I try to hate him. It might spoil my aim—don't you understand? Professionals don't go into these details."

He paused as the truth of her words hit him. Yet he couldn't resist another go. "Well, Miss Bennett, You'll be doing a few hundred thousand people a world of good, not to mention my profession if you complete your job well."

He rose to go and she noted his imposing figure, still slim and in training from his daily workouts in his ranch. She had always admired the flat stomachs of these people, and their figures which few realized were the product of daily physical exercise, hard games of front tennis, climbing hills at dawn in Chapultepec Park, hours of practicing their various "passes" with the muleta and cape.

The next few days brought Miss Bennett to various "tientas" where Juan Montero de la Peña insisted that she absorb some of the atmosphere of the profession. Here she watched as he and his colleagues fought small bulls and brave cows, trying them to test their bravery. These tientas took place on the large ranches where they bred the bulls. She also watched one Sunday in a nearby town where Juan made one of his farewell appearances. Hers was the only dry eye in the Plaza. One of Juan's six sons cut his coleta, the small piece of hair attached to the back of the head—symbol of the matador. To cut this, means, of course, retirement. There were many tearful tours of the arena to the applause of an emotional public. Juan himself cried as he raised a tear-stained face to his fans now showering him with flowers, hats, coats, wineskins. His peons picked them up and threw them back.

The next night propped against her pillows and cocooned in her satin comforter, she watched Chuchu Valente's program again. She noted that as he was giving the results of all the corrida's in the provinces he managed to forget that Juan Montero de la Peña had won two ears from his bulls. He gave detailed attention to many other things, however.

It was rare that any spark of interest could be kindled in the heart of Miss Bennett, if indeed in these days it could be said she had a heart. Yet, as she mused on the heated words of her employer and contemplated Chuchu's smile designed to charm his public, she began to think.

"Well, well, well," she said as the glimmering of a plan came to her. She reached for a chocolate, and her thoughts were long long thoughts. She turned off the set and having adjusted the stereo to its softest level, she slept well.

Her dress couldn't have been shorter without being called a miniskirt. And besides, it hugged the figure as did the dress of the stage version of the Apache, Paris style. The neckline plunged recklessly and a thin strand of beads caressed the throat. In some circles the coiffure could have been called a masterpiece and in a few other circles the word "Caricature" might have been applied. Sleek bangs were plastered to the forehead and a halo of teased curls surrounded the face. She wasn't exactly

chewing gum but she gave that impression as she paused by the store window which displayed cheap clothing. It had taken half an hour to select him and while reinforcing her mascara she watched his reflection in the mirror of the store-window. It was late afternoon, Saturday, and if she was lucky she could be finished by ten o'clock.

He had been following her for some time now, trying to line up her potential which he thought he had actually gaged—but what was really bothering him was that he was sure her price came too high. After all, he was only the janitor-mozo at the cluttered shoe shop on one of the corners of San Juan de Létran. He had just gotten paid, and this week he couldn't stall off the mother of his three month old baby any longer. She had threatened to tell her mistress everything and who knew what that might lead to—maybe a part of his salary *every* week. Of his two hundred pesos—sixteen dollars—he had to part with at least twenty-five—two dollars. He sighed as he thought of the payments to be made on various articles of clothing he had been buying in installments. Why was it that he couldn't have a little fun like his friends did on Saturday nights. Here was the perfect setup. She was "suave". She was "guapa". She was exactly what he wanted for this Saturday night.

Ten minutes later they were arm in arm, being jostled by the busy Saturday crowd. She was quite naive, he thought jubilantly. All she really wanted was a movie and a drink. But on the other hand, what a strange story she told him—some cousin who had told her where she could pick up some quick money. Did he want to be in on it? At first he was wary, but later he decided to go along with it, always leaving a loophole to back out if he smelled trouble. He'd see if it were a proposition that could "jell."

"Don't worry, there's nothing to it. My cousin is the caretaker of this place. He gave me the key. See, he's got to be somewhere else for it to seem authentic!" She pressed against him giving him the full impact of the outline of her breast. "Five hundred pesos each," she murmured.

"We'll see," he replied guardedly. But his heart did a somersault. He always knew that one day his luck would change, and this just might be his opportunity.

Better not to pass it by, and he could still be at Mass bright and early to confess his sins.

But his heart fell as he saw it was only a stuffy old museum after all, a taurine museum combined with a bar which obviously wasn't used often. The taxi had dropped them two blocks away. True she had the key as she had said, and the caretaker had conveniently absented himself, but what in the world could she get from this place. He had pictured something far different.

The small bar, surrounded by mounted heads of bulls long passed into taurine fame, seemed quite dusty and unused. There was a small cash-register behind it and he watched as she tiptoed over to it. She opened it and turned triumphantly. In the light of the candles they carried he recognized the thrilling lineaments of a thousand peso bill she was dangling.

"Half for you, and half for me," she whispered tucking it in her bosom with a smile. Now wait while I do a few things to make believe some thieves have been in. My cousin told me I must do this to protect him. You have to help me."

"We don't have to share the money with him?" he asked doubtfully.

"Oh no. He took all the rest this afternoon. He was just depending on me to come and make it seem real. Look, I'll show you what he told me to do."

Fifteen minutes later, he was perspiring, but still expectant and overwhelmed with anticipation. Though she seemed to have strange ideas of what to do to make the theft seem real, still, he followed her suggestions.

They left by a side door. A few bad moments were consumed in walking unhurriedly away. She had trouble keeping him from sprinting at this point, but she had anticipated this. They caught another cab. His courage returned and what with the seductive bosom and the five hundred pesos that was going to be his tucked neatly there, this combination proved overwhelming.

"What a quiet place," he commented as the cab pulled in the Colonia Portales on a street containing a few scattered houses.

"This is my cousin's house," she said. "Come with me and we can change the bill to divide it."

He now trusted her implicitly. It took only a moment in the lonely hallway

. . .not too hard a blow preceded by a judo hold. It was designed to make him sleep about fifteen minutes, but she had known herself to misjudge this part of it in the past. And yet, he just might wake up to find himself still owner of that five hundred peso bill which she stuffed in his wallet with his salary.

"I have always thought, Mr. Montero, that in true revenge, the avenger must make sure the victim is aware of the revenge imposed upon him."

"Just what do you mean?"

It was the following day, and as Montero was not fighting, he was not feeling guilty about the brandy he was drinking in Miss Bennett's suite.

"One of our great writers, Poe, said it much better," she replied," in his short masterpiece—"

"Frankly, I've never had time to read very much except the taurine news," he interrupted, but I begin to see what you mean—that he suffer!"

"Exactly," she replied. Death is too good for some people. Did you ever think of that?"

"Why, yes, yes, of course," he answered guardedly.

"In some cases, it's wonderful, merciful. . .quick oblivion."

"Yes?"

"But without his knowing the why of it, what good will be your gesture?" she asked.

A new light of appreciation dawned in his face; she easily read his slow and excited comprehension.

"But how? That would be too good to be true! At first I was only thinking of the fiesta brava, but could you arrange—without jeopardizing your position of course—could you also arrange that he *know why?*

She smiled although her eyelids still hurt from the glue of the artificial lashes she had worn the night before.

"I just might be able to do something," she promised. "You've told me about the coming Festival at the "Cortijo" where he'll be fighting as an "aficionado practico".

"Yes, but how can you do anything there? These aficionado practicos fight small bulls more or less well, and there isn't anything anyone can plan with the animal, it's a festival where three members of the press will "fight." There'll be music and mariachis too."

"Yes, I've learned about the program," she said, hand-

ing him a sheet of paper. He read: *"The bull will kill you."*

Montero was puzzled. "But how can you arrange that? Do you plan to send this to him. These small bulls and even brave cows can be dangerous at times. They've been known to kill people, but there's no way they can be trained. . . ."

"He will receive a message like this every day this week until the day of the festival. Of course, not this with our fingerprints on it."

"Of course, he might pull out of the fiesta—refuse to fight—such a note might upset him—he's really a coward at heart—sheer bravado when he's in front of the public in the role of aficionado practico."

She smiled. "I really can't outline everything to you," she said. "I'll do the job, and in this case, I'm giving you a little poetic justice at no extra charge. We'll see if he pulls out of the fiesta."

Bright and clear dawned the day of the festival. The Cortijo, part restaurant and bar with the small bull ring adjoining was teeming with the distinguished guests drawn from the top layers of the worlds of society, politics and of course, the bulls. There were the various workouts of the Charros, one of the exclusive clubs of Mexican men who were preserving the Mexican style of riding.

Then came a display of Mexican folk dancing and singing which was lively and effective and which carried the program to its climax. . . the corrida.

In barrera—the first rows of spectators' seats—were several matadors of international fame including Juan Montero de la Peña. Slightly to the right of them, and in the same row sat Miss Bennett, and as on so many other occasions she sat alone. Yet there was her customary air of self-sufficiency about her which bespoke an unquestionable savoir faire. For the occasion she had worn the traje corto, tailored for her in Cordoba and complete with the Cordobes hat at the correct angle. It was apropo in view of the occasion, for in informal festivals, most of the participants and many spectators used this style.

From time to time various unattached gentlemen came up to chat with her. She was able to count two invitations to dinner, one to cocktails, one to the regular bullfight in Plaza Azteca the following Sunday, and one "Fly-

with-me-to-Acapulco and let me show you the Paradise of the Pacific."

But the moment came. The small band gave the fanfare in its traditional minor tones, and the parade began. These were the practicing aficionados. Miss Bennett noticed a marked difference in the group of matadors watching. They were all attention now. The first three of the parade, the "matadors", were members of the press. Chuchu Valente as "senior" matador took his position to the right while the "banderilleros" formed behind them, all a good imitation of the real thing, but now accompanied with good-natured laughter since the "banderilleros" were various successful professional businessmen who had made a hobby of fighting and placing the banderillas in the necks of small bulls.

This was not to say that the fight would be a farce, for from the first moment the calf would be let into the plaza, the "matadors" would strive to triumph as hard as any professional matador.

Montero stole a look at Miss Bennett and was surprised to see her settle back comfortably in her seat with a cigarette obviously preparing to enjoy the spectacle.

"She at least should have the grace to look a little worried," he thought to himself —that's carrying sophistication too far."

The salute to the "Authorities" was done, then came the signal for the first bull—Chuchu's as "senior" matador.

Chuchu did creditable cape work for his first third to ready applause since neither the judges nor the discriminating Mexican public judged these festivals by professional standards. Then after the banderillas, more or less well placed, he began his serious muleta work.

As they say in taurine circles—he had an "angel" from the beginning. He seemed inspired, and as his calf charged well and he stood his ground, executing a variety of passes until he arrived at the "natural" where the bull is led by the muleta in a slow circle—simple but more dangerous than it ever looks to a nonprofessional—he thought of showing the movies of his fight on his television program the following week.

He needn't have worried, for these pictures were definitely going to be shown on his program. He triumphed roundly, almost carried away and executing the Manolete favorite, "mirando el publi-

co" doing passes while looking at the spectators instead of at an animal likely to change his course at any moment.

Again Montero shot a look at Miss Bennett and caught her applauding furiously with an animation he had never noted in her before. He began to wonder about her. After all, she *was* only a woman—could it be that he had erred after all? His thoughts trailed off as he tensed when he saw Chuchu lining the calf up for the kill. Even after this extraordinary faena, a bad kill could mar his past success. If he hit bone, or made the calf suffer, it was quite possible he would lose the award of the ear which he now had theoretically in his pocket. Chuchu went in, and with his first sword made his kill.

Pandemonium. Up went the handkerchiefs, shouts of "Torero! Torero!" music, all the delirious and sweet rewards of valor. Chuchu bathed in it, saluting with professional modesty the authorities, and accepting a wet towel from his mozo to wipe his face, turning with the right amount of surprise to the man designated by the authorities to award him the two ears of the calf—then the tour of the plaza where flowers, coats, hats, wineskins were showered on him. His face was innocently triumphant—he had proved something to himself and the world and most of all—his own critics. Though the bull had been small, still he had triumphed and he rather thought his two other colleagues couldn't match his feat.

They couldn't. Chuchu remained the hero of the afternoon, and in the museum later, at the bar, he was roundly toasted, coddled, petted and congratulated as becomes a hero. It was ages before Miss Bennett could have a word with him alone. She had to wait patiently until everybody had calmed down sufficiently to catch his eye. She invited him with a gesture to the corner where she sat at the bar.

As he approached, she spoke the sweetest words to his ear. "You're wonderful," she said. "You're simply wonderful!"

He gallantly disclaimed his triumph with a gesture. "Had I known you sooner, I'd have dedicated my bull to you," he told her.

As she had heard him say these words to at least two other attractive females, she felt no sense of shame or

guilt—emotions long since foreign to her nature.

"There's something important I want to tell you," she said slowly. "Come closer and listen carefully."

He looked down on her with more interest, still flushed with triumph absolutely happy. "Of course," he said approaching her more closely, half expecting some romantic opening from this "gringa."

"The bull will kill you!" she said, "And in the name of every career you've blighted and every half-truth you've told and every omission you've made."

He paled, but even before he had time to speak, it crashed down upon his head, fifty kilos of mounted bull's head complete with horns. She scarcely had time to jump from its trajectory which she had calculated almost too neatly. Later everyone was to congratulate her on her narrow escape. They took her to the ladies' room to give her tranquilizers for her nerves.

"I don't usually work this way," she told Montero later. "It was only for the sense of the fitness of things that I used this method."

"I don't know what to say—I never thought—" Montero was still numb from the swift sequence of the events which had followed what the papers called the tragic and untimely death of that respected and renowned personality, Chuchu Valente.

She checked her bag. Passport, cosmetics, small bills in pesos and dollars, plane ticket, handkerchiefs. "These things are always shocking to amateurs like you," she said. "You take these things in your hands and then afterwards, you are stunned. Life is never the same for you. I could have told you all that but you wouldn't have listened to me. You were a crusader, weren't you?"

He ruffled and tried to think of something cutting to say to this strange woman. It was no good. Some instinct told him she was not quite human.

"I did right," he insisted. "He deserved it."

"Of course he did," she agreed. She rose to go to her waiting car.

"And you should feel very good about it," she added. "I've told you what my last words were to him—also how I planned and executed it—something I rarely tell. Having loosened that particular stuffed head previously and attached the strong black nylon string where I could

reach it to be sure it fell when and where I wanted it was really much more of a problem than my usual technique."

"It was a stroke of genius," he admitted. "So right. The bull did kill him!"

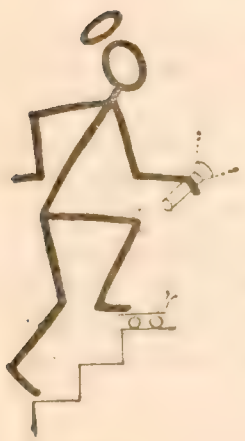
"It was nothing," she smiled. "Really nothing. I'll be watching for your son to take his alternativo in Spain next year."

The drive to the airport was pleasant. Miss Bennett hummed a tune she had heard for the first time the night before. She consulted her watch. In four hours she would be in her apartment. She decided that after checking the contents of the roll of bills which she well knew was even now resting in the pocket of her thirsty terry-cloth bathrobe in the closet, she'd go out and buy a few new tapes for her hi fi. Then, she just might be lucky enough to catch Mr. Gerard and get a new coiffure.

NEXT MONTH—

THE MOORS MURDERS

An article by *MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD*



TREACHEROUS TRIANGLE

A new *Triple V* story

by *WENZELL BROWN*

and

DEATH GAME

Another exciting *Brand New* Saint Novel

—in your August 1967 THE SAINT MAGAZINE

what's new in crime

by Stefan Santesson

Captain José Maria Carvalho Santos Da Silva, liason officer between the Brazilian police and Interpol, has perhaps the toughest assignment of his somewhat less than placid career as his Government is warned that Juan Dorcas, Argentine critic of our policies in Latin America, is to be assassinated at the imminent O.A.S. meetings. Captain Da Silva's responsibility, in Robert L. Fish' ALWAYS KILL A STRANGER (Putnam, $3.95), is to catch up with the willing and able murderer, a professional, *before* he commits the murder.... Recommended.

William Haggard's latest Colonel Russell story, THE POWER HOUSE (Washburn, $3.95), is another of those novels where you find yourself wondering, with quiet or less than quiet exasperation, how much is founded on fact, and who is the personality whose foibles and

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The writer, whose anthology, THE AWARD ESPIONAGE READER, was published by Award Books last year, has been editor of this magazine since 1956. Formerly, 1945-'52, *editor, Unicorn Mystery Book Club, he was awarded the* 1963 *Critics' Edgar by the Mystery Writers of America.*

whose fears jointly contribute to near-embarass the government of the mercilessly portrayed Prime Minister. This is possibly the most interesting, and certainly the most topical, of the author's novels about the Security Executive which Charles Russell heads with such quiet efficiency.

Victor Canning's new Rex novel, DOUBLED IN DIAMONDS (Morrow, $4.95), is however not quite in the same category. Pure escape reading, it has to do with the further adventures of Mr. Canning's entry into the James Bond sweepstakes. Mr. Carver struggles manfully with some rather improbable (but often goodlooking) situations, and does his undoubted best.

Ellery Queen's excellent FACE TO FACE (New American Library, $4.95), is a welcome contribution to that special group of novels you will want to read again, at a later date, and in this instance obviously compare in your mind with the earlier novels in the Queen saga. With quiet envy and respect, if you're a professional....

ROGUE RUNNING, Maurice Procter's new Detective Chief Inspector Martineau novel (Harper & Row, $4.50), is another of the author's superb police procedure novels. I have from time to time, in the past, commented on what I have called the socio-documentary trend in this field. This is an example of it at its best—a mirror held up into which we may gaze, with varying degrees of recognition. And understanding.

I am not going to pretend to be impartial about THE SAINT MAGAZINE READER, edited by Leslie Charteris and this writer (Doubleday, $4.50), which I hope you have read by now. Here are some of the stories, by David Alexander, Anthony Boucher, Robert L. Fish, Edward D. Hoch, William Irish, Veronica Parker Johns, Judith Merril and others, which we have brought you in this magazine during these past years.

You cannot work with a magazine such as this for more than a decade without it seeming to have a personality of its own—something that is a part of your own life. It's been my hope that this has gotten across from time to time, both in this column and in the calibre of the stories in this anthology. I hope you've agreed. And will continue to do so....

the oblong room

by Edward D. Hoch

It was Fletcher's case from the beginning, but Captain Leopold rode along with him when the original call came in. The thing seemed open and shut, with the only suspect found literally standing over his victim, and on a dull day Leopold thought that a ride out to the University might be pleasant.

Here, along the river, the October color was already in the trees, and through the park a slight haze of burning leaves clouded the road in spots. It was a warm day for autumn, a sunny day. Not really a day for murder.

"The University hasn't changed much," Leopold commented, as they turned into the narrow street that led past the fraternity houses to the library tower. "A few new dorms, and a new stadium. That's about all."

"We haven't had a case here since that bombing four or five years back." Fletcher

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Leopold of Homicide returns, after much too long an absence, in this story about two young men whose search for what they feel must be The Truth can be said to reflect the restlessness, the hopelessness, you might almost add the sense of betrayal, which is making so many of our young likewise deny our mores and our Gods. Whom they feel we mock. They say the world we are leaving them is a shambles, morally and politically, destroying itself before its time. So they take refuge in its shadows, until their time comes.

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said. "This one looks to be a lot easier, though. They've got the guy already. Stabbed his roommate and then stayed right there with the body."

Leopold was silent. They'd pulled up before one of the big new dormitories that towered toward the sky like some middle-income housing project, all brick and concrete and right now surrounded by milling students. Leopold pinned on his badge and led the way.

The room was on the fourth floor, facing the river. It seemed to be identical to all the others—A depressing oblong with bunk beds, twin study desks, wardrobes, and a large picture window opposite the door. The Medical Examiner was already there, and he looked up as Leopold and Fletcher entered. "We're ready to move him. All right with you, Captain?"

"The boys get their pictures? Then it's fine with me. Fletcher, find out what you can." Then, to the Medical Examiner, "What killed him?"

"A couple of stab wounds. I'll do an autopsy, but there's not much doubt."

"How long dead?"

"A day or so."

"A day!"

Fletcher had been making notes as he questioned the others. "The precinct men have it pretty well wrapped up for us, Captain. The dead boy is Ralph Rollings, a sophomore. His roommate admits to being here with the body for maybe twenty hours before they were discovered. Roommate's name is Tom McBern. They've got him in the next room."

Leopold nodded and went through the connecting door. Tom McBern was tall and slender, and handsome in a dark, collegiate sort of way. "Have you warned him of his rights?" Leopold asked a patrolman.

"Yes sir."

"All right." Leopold sat down on the bed opposite McBern. "What have you got to say, son?"

The deep brown eyes came up to meet Leopold's. "Nothing, sir. I think I want a lawyer."

"That's your privilege, of course. You don't wish to make any statement about how your roommate met his death, or why you remained in the room with him for several hours without reporting it?"

"No, sir." He turned away and stared out the window.

"You understand we'll

have to book you on suspicion of homicide."

The boy said nothing more, and after a few moments Leopold left him alone with the officer. He went back to Fletcher and watched while the body was covered and carried away. "He's not talking. Wants a lawyer. Where are we?"

Sergeant Fletcher shrugged. "All we need is motive. They probably had the same girl or something."

"Find out."

They went to talk with the boy who occupied the adjoining room, the one who'd found the body. He was sandy-haired and handsome, with the look of an athlete, and his name was Bill Smith.

"Tell us how it was, Bill," Leopold said.

"There's not much to tell. I knew Ralph and Tom slightly during my freshman year, but never really well. They stuck pretty much together. This year I got the room next to them, but the connecting door was always locked. Anyway, yesterday neither one of them showed up at class. When I came back yesterday afternoon I knocked at the door and asked if anything was wrong. Tom called out that they were sick. He wouldn't open the door. I went into my own room and didn't think much about it. Then, this morning, I knocked to see how they were. Tom's voice sounded so. . .strange."

"Where was your own roommate all this time?"

"He's away. His father died and he went home for the funeral." Smith's hands were nervous, busy with a shredded piece of paper. Leopold offered him a cigarette and he took it. "Anyway, when he wouldn't open the door I became quite concerned and told him I was going for help. He opened it then —and I saw Ralph stretched out on the bed, all bloody and. . .dead."

Leopold nodded and went to stand by the window. From here he could see the trees down along the river, blazing gold and amber and scarlet as the October sun passed across them. "Had you heard any sounds the previous day? Any argument?"

"No. Nothing. Nothing at all."

"Had they disagreed in the past about anything?"

"Not that I knew of. If they didn't get along, they hardly would have asked to room together again this year."

"How about girls?" Leopold asked.

"They both dated occasionally, I think."

"No special one? One they both liked?"

Bill Smith was silent for a fraction too long. "No."

"You're sure?"

"I told you I didn't know them very well."

"This is murder, Bill. It's not a sophomore dance or class day games."

"Tom killed him. What more do you need?"

"What's her name, Bill?"

He stubbed out the cigarette and looked away. Then finally he answered. "Stella Banting. She's a junior."

"Which one did she go with?"

"I don't know. She was friendly with both of them. I think she went out with Ralph a few times around last Christmas, but I'd seen her with Tom lately."

"She's older than them?"

"No. They're all twenty. She's just a year ahead."

"All right," Leopold said. "Sergeant Fletcher will want to question you further."

He left Smith's room and went out in the hall with Fletcher. "It's your case, Sergeant. About time I gave it to you."

"Thanks for the help, Captain."

"Let him talk to a lawyer and then see if he has a story. If he still won't make a statement, book him on suspicion. I don't think there's any doubt we can get an indictment."

"You going to talk to that girl?"

Leopold smiled. "I just might. Smith seemed a bit shy about her. Might be a motive there. Let me know as soon as the medical examiner has something more definite about the time of death."

"Right, Captain."

Leopold went downstairs, pushing his way through the students and faculty members still crowding the halls and stairways. Outside he unpinned the badge and put it away. The air was fresh and crisp as he strolled across the campus to the administration building.

Stella Banting lived in the largest sorority house on campus, a great columned building of ivy and red brick. But when Captain Leopold found her she was on her way back from the drug store, carrying a carton of cigarettes and a bottle of shampoo. Stella was a tall girl with firm, angular lines and a face that might have been beautiful if she ever smiled.

"Stella Banting?"

"Yes?"

"I'm Captain Leopold. I wanted to talk to you about the tragedy over at the men's dorm. I trust you've heard about it?"

She blinked her eyes and said, "Yes. I've heard."

"Could we go somewhere and talk?"

"I'll drop these at the house and we can walk if you'd like. I don't want to talk there."

She was wearing faded bermuda shorts and a bulky sweatshirt, and walking with her made Leopold feel young again. If only she smiled occasionally—but perhaps this was not a day for smiling. They headed away from the main campus, out toward the silent oval of the athletic field and sports stadium. "You didn't come over to the dorm," he said to her finally, breaking the silence of their walk.

"Should I have?"

"I understood you were friendly with them—that you dated the dead boy last Christmas and Tom McBern more recently."

"A few times. Ralph wasn't the sort anyone ever got to know very well."

"And what about Tom?"

"He was a nice fellow."

"*Was?*"

"It's hard to explain. Ralph did things to people, to everyone around him. When I felt it happening to me, I broke away."

"What sort of things?"

"He had a power—a power you wouldn't believe any twenty-year-old capable of."

"You sound as if you've known a lot of them."

"I have. This is my third year at the University. I've grown up a lot in that time. I think I have, anyway."

"And what about Tom McBern?"

"I dated him a few times recently just to confirm for myself how bad things were. He was completely under Ralph's thumb. He lived for no one but Ralph."

"Homosexual?" Leopold asked.

"No, I don't think it was anything as blatant as that. It was more the relationship of teacher and pupil, leader and follower."

"Master and slave?"

She turned to smile at him. "You do seem intent on midnight orgies, don't you?"

"The boy is dead, after all."

"Yes. Yes, he is." She stared down at the ground, kicking randomly at the little clusters of fallen leaves. "But you see what I mean? Ralph was always the leader, the

teacher—for Tom, almost the messiah."

"Then why would he have killed him?" Leopold asked.

"That's just it—he wouldn't! Whatever happened in that room, I can't imagine Tom McBern ever bringing himself to kill Ralph."

"There is one possibility, Miss Banting. Could Ralph Rollings have made a disparaging remark about you? Something about when he was dating you?"

"I never slept with Ralph, if that's what you're trying to ask me. With either of them, for that matter."

"I didn't mean it that way."

"It happened just the way I've told you. If anything, I was afraid of Ralph. I didn't want him getting that sort of hold over me."

Somehow he knew they'd reached the end of their stroll, even though they were still in the middle of the campus quadrangle, some distance from the sports arena. "Thank you for your help, Miss Banting. I may want to call on you again."

He left her there and headed back toward the men's dorm, knowing that she would watch him until he was out of sight.

Sergeant Fletcher found Leopold in his office early the following morning, reading the daily reports of the night's activities. "Don't you ever sleep, Captain?" he asked, pulling up the faded leather chair that served for infrequent visitors.

"I'll have enough time for sleeping when I'm dead. What have you got on McBern?"

"His lawyer says he refuses to make a statement, but I gather they'd like to plead him not guilty by reason of insanity."

"What's the medical examiner say?"

Fletcher read from a typed sheet. "Two stab wounds, both in the area of the heart. He apparently was stretched out on the bed when he got it."

"How long before they found him?"

"He'd eaten breakfast maybe an hour or so before he died, and from our questioning that places the time of death at about ten o'clock. Bill Smith went to the door and got McBern to open it at about eight the following morning. Since we know McBern was in the room the previous evening when Smith spoke to him through the door, we can assume he was alone with the body for ap-

proximately t w e n t y - t w o hours."

Leopold was staring out the window, mentally comparing the city's autumn gloom with the colors of the countryside that he'd witnessed the previous day. Everything dies, only it dies a little sooner, a bit more drably, in the city. "What else?" he asked Fletcher, because there obviously was something else.

"In one of the desk drawers," Fletcher said, producing a little evidence envelope. "Six sugar cubes, saturated with LSD."

"All right." Leopold stared down at them. "I guess that's not too unusual on campuses these days. Has there ever been a murder committed by anyone under the influence of LSD?"

"A case out west somewhere. And I think another one over in England."

"Can we get a conviction, or is this the basis of the insanity plea?"

"I'll check on it, Captain."

"And one more thing—get that fellow Smith in here. I want to talk with him again."

Later, alone, Leopold felt profoundly depressed. The case bothered him. McBern had stayed with Rollings' body for twenty-two hours. Anybody that could last that long would have to be crazy. He was crazy and he was a killer and that was all there was to it. . .

When Fletcher ushered Bill Smith into the office an hour later, Leopold was staring out the window. He turned and motioned the young man to a chair. "I have some further questions, Bill."

"Yes?"

"Tell me about the LSD."

"What?"

Leopold walked over and sat on the edge of the desk. "Don't pretend you never heard of it. Rollings and McBern had some in their room.

Bill Smith looked away. "I didn't know. There were rumors."

"Nothing else? No noise through that connecting door?"

"Noise, yes. Sometimes it was. . . ."

Leopold waited for him to continue, and when he did not, said, "This is a murder investigation, Bill."

"Rollings. . .he deserved to die, that's all. He was the most completely evil person I ever knew. The things he did to poor Tom. . ."

"Stella Banting says Tom almost worshipped him."

"He did, and that's what made it all the more terrible."

Leopold leaned back and lit a cigarette. "If they were both high on LSD, almost anyone could have entered that room and stabbed Ralph."

But Bill Smith shook his head. "I doubt it. They wouldn't have dared unlock the door while they were turned on. Besides, Tom would have protected him with his own life."

"And yet we're to believe that Tom killed him? That he stabbed him to death and then spent a day and a night alone with the body? Doing what, Bill? Doing what?"

"I don't know."

"Do you think Tom McBern is insane?"

"No, not really. Not legally." He glanced away. "But on the subject of Rollings, he was pretty far gone. Once, when we were still friendly, he told me he'd do anything for Rollings—even trust him with his life. And he did, one time. It was during the spring weekend and everybody had been drinking a lot. Tom hung upside down out of the dorm window with Rollings holding his ankles. That's how much he trusted him."

"I think I'll have to talk with Tom McBern again," Leopold said. "At the scene of the crime."

Fletcher brought Tom McBern out to the campus in handcuffs, and Captain Leopold was waiting for them in the oblong room on the fourth floor. "All right, Fletcher," Leopold said. "You can leave us alone. Wait outside."

McBern had lost a good deal of his previous composure, and now he faced Leopold with red-ringed eyes and a lip that trembled when he spoke. "What. . .what did you want to ask me?"

"A great many things, son. All the questions in the world." Leopold sighed and offered the boy a cigarette. "You and Rollings were taking LSD, weren't you?"

"We took it, yes."

"Why? For kicks?"

"Not for kicks. You don't understand about Ralph."

"I understand that you killed him. What more is there to understand? You stabbed him to death right over there on that bed."

Tom McBern took a deep breath. "We didn't take LSD for kicks," he repeated. "It was more to heighten the sense of religious experience —a sort of mystical involvement that is the whole meaning of life."

Leopold frowned down at the boy. "I'm only a detective, son. You and Rollings were strangers to me until

yesterday, and I guess now he'll always be a stranger to me. That's one of the troubles with my job. I don't get to meet people until it's too late, until the damage," he gestured toward the empty bed, "is already done. But I want to know what happened in this room, between you two. I don't want to hear about mysticism or religious experience. I want to hear what happened—why you killed him and why you sat here with the body for twenty-two hours."

Tom McBern looked up at the walls, seeing them perhaps for the first and thousandth time. "Did you ever think about this room? About the shape of it? Ralph used to say it reminded him of a story by Poe, *The Oblong Box.* Remember that story? The box was on board a ship, and of course it contained a body. Like Queequeg's coffin which rose from the sea to rescue Ishmael."

"And this room was Ralph's coffin?" Leopold asked quietly.

"Yes." McBern stared down at his handcuffed wrists. "His tomb."

"You killed him, didn't you?"

"Yes."

Leopold looked away. "Do you want your lawyer?"

"No. Nothing."

"My God! Twenty-two hours!"

"I was. . ."

"I know what you were doing. But I don't think you'll ever tell it to a judge and jury."

"I'll tell you, because maybe you can understand." And he began to talk in a slow, quiet voice, and Leopold listened because that was his job.

Toward evening, when Tom McBern had been returned to his cell and Fletcher sat alone with Leopold, he said, "I've called the District Attorney, Captain. What are you going to tell him?"

"The facts, I suppose. McBern will sign a confession of just how it happened. The rest is out of our hands."

"Do you want to tell me about it, Captain?"

"I don't think I want to tell anyone about it. But I suppose I have to. I guess it was all that talk of religious experience and coffins rising from the ocean that tipped me off. You know, that Rollings pictured their room as a sort of tomb."

"For him it was."

"I wish I'd known him, Fletcher. I only wish I'd known him in time."

"What would you have done?"

"Perhaps only listened and tried to understand him."

"McBern admitted killing him?"

Leopold nodded. "It seems that Rollings asked him to, and Tom McBern trusted him more than life itself."

"Rollings asked to be stabbed through the heart?"

"Yes."

"Then why did McBern stay with the body so long? For a whole day and night?"

"He was waiting," Leopold said quietly, looking at nothing at all. "He was waiting for Rollings to rise from the dead."

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ANASTASIA?

The issue of whether or not Anna Anderson is in truth the Grand Duchess Anastasia, daughter of Nicholas the Second, has of course not been settled by the decision against her handed down on February 28th, 1967, by the Hanseatic High Court of Hamburg, the latest development in her thirty-five years long fight for recognition as a member of the Romanoff family.

One of the grounds for a further appeal to the Federal Supreme Court in Karlsruhe could be the strange fact that the High Court, presumably for reasons of its own, pointedly failed to call upon any of the forty-four witnesses, who support her claim, to give evidence before the Court. To quote Prince Frederick Ernest of Saxe-Altenburg, a relative of the Grand Duchess Anastasia's,—"Four former members of Grand Duchess Anastasia's family who knew her at the Tsarist court have certified that she is identical with Anna Anderson and so have four other people who were at the Tsarist court at the time in various capacities, including the son of the Tsar's personal physician." (London *Sunday Times,* March 5, 1967)

The Hamburg Court will not publish its reasons for arriving at its decision until June, and even then it is of course possible that these will not fully explain the Court's interesting attitude. A number of members of her family, and particularly her uncle, Ernest Louis, Grand Duke of Hesse, have of course challenged her claim. Much of the troubles she has had to face in Germany have stemmed from the Grand Duke's opposition.

Anna Anderson had been suing Barbara, Duchess of Mecklenburg, as titular chief claimant to "the Tsar's missing millions" which the Bank of England denies are in their vaults. The Duchess has never actually voiced this claim, but simply inherited the litigation from her grand-mother, the late Princess Henry of Prussia. the Tsarina's youngest sister. It is worth noting that Princess Henry's son, Prince Sigismund of Prussia, and the Grand-Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Weimar, Princess Louisa of Saxe-Meiningen, Princess Margerethe Urach, Countess of Wurtemburg, Cecilie, Crown Princess of Germany, *and* the Grand Duke Andrew, are among those who have accepted and befriended her. **I. L.**

screen test

by Cornell Woolrich

"She's been getting threatening letters," he finished telling me.

"Don't they all?" I said. "Any time the press agent can't think of anything else—"

"No, not this time," he said firmly. "I saw some of them myself. They were sent down here to us."

I didn't answer.

I suppose he could tell by my face I didn't like the deal. He looked me over curiously. "What've you got against people like them, her and the rest? You don't like them, do you? I've noticed that before."

"Why should I?" I said sullenly. "They're all phony and a yard wide. What makes them so special, anyway? Who were they before? One of them used to lather men's kissers in a barber shop. Anyone that had the price of a shave on him and walked in off the street, mind you! Another used to strut the Coney

---

Here is one of Cornell Woolrich's first stories! Turn the clock back with him in the '30's for a while, to those, in retrospect, disturbingly innocent times when our ways of life—even our ways of murder—were geared to a different tempo; when some of us still had hope for the Days after the Tomorrows, and when there was still no public debate on the question of whether "God is dead." And yet, none of us who lived through the '30's can, in all honesty, feel nostalgia for those days when we all had dreams....

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Island boardwalk on stilts. A barker for a side show."

"Does that mean they're not entitled to police protection?" he inquired pointedly.

"Everyone is," I conceded grudgingly.

"Haven't they ever entertained you?" he wanted to know.

"They're not real up there," I argued. "I go and sit there in front of them. But they're not real. They're just photographs on celluloid."

"They eat, they drink, they sleep, they love, just like the rest of us. Maybe they're even lonely sometimes, maybe they're even scared."

All I said was, "They wanted to be where they are, didn't they? Nothing less would satisfy them. Well, now they're there. What do they want *now*, sympathy?"

"Did you ever see this one?" he asked.

"I can't tell one from the other," I prevaricated sulkily. "They all look alike to me. They're just names going around without bodies, far as I'm concerned."

"Well, I wouldn't exactly call Betty Grable or Jean Harlow, for instance, someone going around without a—" he started to say. Then he didn't. "Anyway, her studio just called and asked us to furnish her with protection. And we are."

"It's just like being a lapdog, going around trailing one of them," I complained, half under my breath. "Babysitter to a— Why me, anyway. Isn't there anyone else?"

He rattled some desk papers definitively. "A while back, before we started this kind of informal conversation, I seem to recall giving you an assignment. Are you refusing it?"

"No, sir, I'm not." What else was there to say to *that?*

"All right, Galbraith. Get right out there and don't let her out of your sight until further notice. And remember one thing, your job isn't to trace these threats or track down whoever sent them; it's just to keep your eye on Martha Meadows and see that nothing happens to her. You're responsible for her safety."

"Yes, sir," I said. I gave a sigh with it, but I said it just the same.

Unquestionably, I was the most reluctant, unenthusiastic, semimutinous plainclothes man who ever started out on an assignment, as I walked out of headquarters that day and thumbed up a taxi. The sooner I got busy

on the job, I figured, the sooner the chief might relent and take me off it. The taxi, and everything else from now on, was at Miss Meadows' studio's expense, but that didn't make me like her any the better. Without actually wishing her any harm, I was far from being a devoted fan of hers at the moment. In fact, I could even almost sympathize with whoever was writing her the letters; that was the frame of mind I was in about her.

The studio, a biscuit-colored stucco job on Marathon Street, up near where Vine meets the Boulevard, looked more like a railroad car barn (blank side out) than anything else. Having been born here and having lived in Los Angeles all my life, I had never, expectedly enough, been inside one of these places. In the same way that you never visit museums or other points of interest in your own town; it's always the outsiders who do that.

I showed the gateman my credentials; he picked up a phone there in his little booth, said: "From police headquarters, to see Miss Meadows," and at once everything opened up high, wide and handsome. I was passed from hand to hand, like a basketball in a high-voltage game, in the process of getting to her.

She was in her bungalow dressing room, resting between scenes and having her lunch when the last of the receptionist relays tapped, oh-so-apologetically, and convoyed me in. Then he tactfully bowed right out again. Just a studio underling, I guess, in the presence of majesty, and not supposed to hang around her.

The dressing room had chintz drapes, like my wife has at home; only ours aren't as good. Her lunch was a malted milk and a paper-thin sandwich, the lettuce leaf thicker than the bread that held it. Probably something to do with her measurements, which were of national moment. Not to me, but to the entire feminine population, no doubt.

She had a thick make-up on, but somehow it wouldn't work. By that I mean, underneath it she still looked sort of fresh and clean. Soap-and-scrubbing-brush type. She looked like your best friend's kid sister, about like that. The one that suddenly grows up and turns beautiful in front of your eyes, but you still never get used to it; she's always just a kid to you. That one.

"Galbraith, from head-

quarters, Miss Meadows," I said perfunctorily.

She looked at me for a minute, and then she said, sort of solemnly: "You don't look at all like I thought detectives do."

I came right back with: "And you don't look at all like I thought picture stars do."

She waited, thought about it, then finally asked: "Is that good—about picture stars?"

"Very good," I said earnestly.

Then I asked her: "Is that good—about detectives?"

She dropped her eyes closed, opened them again, to show me she meant yes.

And, I don't know, but then, just like that, all of a sudden we were friends; we liked each other.

A colored woman, her maid I guess, looked in and started to say: "Honey, is you nearly—" Then when she saw me, she scrutinized me good; her eyes traveled down me until they reached my hand, then they locked there and she burst out suddenly: "Look here, man, don't you bring that lit cig-ret in here. What you want to do to that child?" She plucked it unceremoniously away from me, took it outside the door and trampled on it heavily. Far more than was required to deaden it.

I didn't know what it was all about for a minute. I hadn't been drawing on it, and the Meadows girl looked too young to be an asthma sufferer.

"Don't get so peevish, Nellie," Martha Meadows ordered with an indulgent smile. "She means this," she explained to me, and pointed to her dress. "It has celluloid underneath, to stiffen it. If a spark gets on it—" She was dressed as a Civil War belle, with a wide hoop skirt the size of a beach unbrella.

"Just 'cause it ain't happen' so far, don't mean it can't happen yet 'fore you're through," snapped the protective Nellie. "Wardrobe had no right to make you up such a thing, anyhow." She continued about her business, muttering darkly to herself.

The Meadows girl winked at me and said, half under her breath: "Always looking on the dark side of things."

The dressing-room telephone rang and she picked it up. "All right; I'm ready whenever you are." She turned to me. "I have to go back on the set now. We're shooting the big scene this afternoon. So if you'll ex—"

"Sorry," I said quickly.

"You don't understand. I'll have to go right along with you. Those are my orders."

She thought about that for a minute, then shrugged. "I have no objection. But the director mayn't like the idea of admitting outsiders to the set. He hates to have people watch him when he works. He's very temperamental, you know."

I gave her a sleepy-eyed look and said: "He'll get over it."

She put a little antiquated-looking shawl around her shoulders, Nellie handed her a pair of old-fashioned lace mitts and the three of us left the bungalow. I let her and the maid go in front and I followed at a discreet distance. They walked along a number of lanes between low studio buildings—it was like a little city in itself, in there—and finally stopped before an entrance that bore the sign: "Set VIII, Meadows, Civil War Picture." People were hanging around outside it, some in costume and some not. It looked strange to see a girl concealed in crinoline down to her toes chatting with a girl in bullpants and a halter top. They made way for her respectfully as she passed through them and went in. She bowed slightly to one or two and they nearly fell all over themselves bowing back.

Inside, the place had a cement floor, criss-crossed over with a lot of little steel rails like baby train tracks. I suppose they were for moving heavy camera trucks back and forth, I don't know; I'm just giving you a detective's-eye view of something I didn't know the first thing about. Cables and ropes and wires and pulleys galore were dangling from the rafters. Canvas backdrops were stacked, like cards, up against the walls. But it wasn't out here they were going to shoot the scene, I could tell that much. There was a soundproof door with a light bulb over it, leading in to the sound stage itself, where the action was to take place.

Before we got to it, though, a bald-headed man in a pullover sweater came up to Meadows. He was about five feet tall and with a nose like an eagle's beak. A girl carrying a thick script, chunky as a telephone directory, was following him around whereever he went. By a process of elimination, I figured he must be the director. He was too short and homely to be her leading man; he wasn't in costume, so he wasn't the "heavy"; and he wasn't in a business suit and sitting still

in an office, so he wasn't the producer.

"Who is this?" he asked, meaning me.

When she explained, he raised both hands to his head, as if he would have liked to tear out some hair, only, as I've mentioned, there wasn't any there that he could.

"Now a detective!" he said. "First it was your colored maid. Then zumbody else. Now him. Who it'll be next? It's already too many people around here. I can't verk in crowds. I am sensitiff!"

She kept trying to calm him down. "Now, Stormy," and I thought that was a very good name for him, "now, Stormy, he won't be in the way—"

"When I was at Oofa, in Behrrrlin," he declaimed, "you think they would dare do this to me? At Oofa, I got reshpect. At Oofa, was no cops butting into my verk!"

I didn't like being called a cop. I gave him a pun and a sour look, both at the same time. "Well, I'm Oofally sorry, but you're not at Oofa now; you're in the city of Los Angeles!"

"Yah, Loss Ancheles!" he agreed spitefully.

Finally I cut the whole thing short by saying I'd phone in and leave it up to the chief whether I went in or stayed out; he was the one who had given me the assignment in the first place, and I'd put it up to him.

But the one telephone I could locate inside the place was already in use and I had to chase all the way outside and around to the studio commissary before I could find another.

The chief went off like a firecracker when I told him. "What's the matter with those people anyway? I'm beginning to think you're right! First they ask me for a bodyguard for her, then they start shooing him away. You go in there, Gal, and if they try to keep you out, quit the case cold and report back here to me. I'll wash my hands of all responsibility for her safety!" Which was music to my ears, as I hadn't liked the job from the start.

When I got back, sure enough, this stormy petrel of a director had taken advantage of the opportunity; the soundproof door was already closed, the red light was on above it to warn that shooting was ready to start inside and they had all gone in without waiting. There was even a guard stationed outside the door to keep people from opening it by mistake.

"It wasn't her fault," he told me. "Stormann argued

her into going in without you. And he's some arguer, that boy."

"Oh, he did, did he?" I burned. "Who does he think he is? He may be the whole cheese around here, but he's not even a bad smell to us down at headquarters!"

I didn't want to crash the door open and force my way in; it would have ruined the scene, cost the company thousands of dollars, and it wouldn't have been fair to Meadows, who wasn't to blame in the first place.

"Only an angel like her," the guard was confiding to me, "could get along with him. Nobody likes him."

"Give her my regards when she comes out," I said bitterly, "and tell her for me—"

With that, almost as though I'd been overheard, the door suddenly opened from the inside without any warning, the red bulb automatically dimmed, and a series of jagged screams stabbed out at us. The screams of the dying, they were like. No one could scream like that and go on living very long.

"That's real, that's not in the scene!" the guard yelped unnecessarily, jolting with shock. He didn't have to tell me. It had to be real; no imitation scream could have sounded like that.

Meadows' maid was suddenly in the doorway, arms pin wheeling all around her in a futile flurry. Her own voice was almost gone from fright. "Oh, somebody—! Quick, somebody—! I've been hammering on this do', I thought I'd never get it open—!" But the screaming went right on behind her, and a sort of a flickering light effect, like a jittery sunrise that kept moving around from this side to that.

I rushed in, the guard after me. Martha Meadows, with the cameras still playing on her, was burning alive there before everyone's eyes. She was a living torch, a funnel of fire from head to foot and screaming her life away. She was running blindly here and there, like some kind of a horrible human firework, and the flames were streaming after her like ribbons, flattened out by the swiftness of her rushing. She was out of her head, mad with agony and kept eluding their extended arms, ducking and doubling back and forth with hellish agility, while her life went up in vivid yellow-white gushes. I'll see that scene for years to come. On every screen I sit before, it will come back again.

I didn't try to catch her in my arms; I couldn't. I

flung myself at her bodily, head down right into the flames, like in a football tackle. I whipped stinging hands around something soft and quivering inside that glow that had once been cool human flesh. The pillar of fire toppled over and lay horizontal along the ground, with the flames foreshortened now and just licking upward all around it like bright scallops. A blanket or something was thrown over her, and partly over me, too. As it fell, a puff of horrid black smoke spurted out all around the edges, the last scream stopped and she was still.

I held my breath, to avoid inhaling any of the damned stuff. I could feel rescuing hands beating all around the two of us through the blanket. After a minute I picked myself up. My hands were smarting, my shirt cuffs were scorched brown in places and peeling back and sparks had eaten into the front of my suit. Otherwise I was all right. But what lay under the blanket—alone now—didn't move. Five minutes ago one of the most beautiful girls in America, and now something it was better not to look at.

As if in gruesome jest, the winking eyes of the cameras were still focused on her and, in the deathly silence that had now fallen, you could hear the whirring noise that meant they were still grinding away, unattended. The crew were all down on the floor around her. No one had had presence of mind enough to turn them off.

The guard who had been at the door had sent in a call for help, even before the flames had been beaten out. The studio had a first-aid station of its own a door or two away, and two men arrived with a stretcher and carried her out on it, still under the blanket. Nellie went with them, staggering like a wounded steer, and pleading with someone—someone whose identity only she knew— "No, please, No, don't do this—!" Hands clasped before her eyes.

Stormann, for once, was wordless — stunned with shock, I guess. And shaking like a leaf, with all the cowardice that only loud-mouthed little men like him can know. Terrified even by the other person's calamity—but not by sympathy; only because they were so close to it that it might have happened to themselves. I saw one of the electricians giving him whiskey in a paper drinking-cup. The script girl was the only one there who seem-

ed to have kept her head about her. Staring owlishly through those oblique-shaped glasses she wore down at the pages of her script, as though this whole thing puzzled her.

I went over to her, dabbing some oil they'd given me onto the angry red patches on the backs of my hands and wrists, and asked: "How'd it happen?"

"It's not in here," she said, continuing to pore. "It's not in here."

I swallowed hard, to cork up my patience. "It wouldn't be, would it?" I tried again. "Where— Where was she, when it happened?"

"Right here," she said instantly, and put her finger down. "Right here. See— where it says 'Oh, won't he ever come?' " She even turned the script around helpfully, so I could read it with less difficulty. "That's her line. I was following very closely, the way I'm supposed to. She's supposed to be waiting by the window for her lover. Well, she spoke it, all right, and then the next thing I knew, there was a funny shiny light on the pages of my book. I looked up, and it was coming from her. She had it all over her. I quickly looked back at the book, to see if it was some new effect they'd thought up, but I couldn't find it anywhere—"

I gave her up. This wasn't a girl, this was a machine. I bet even on her own deathbed she'd ask her Maker, "What's my next line, Lord? I've lost my place in the script."

I tackled Stormann next. He was on his third or fourth paper cupful by now, and getting bleary in a heavy Teutonic way. You could see that he felt deeply sorry— for himself. "Mein picture," he was lamenting, "mein *kleiner* picture! *Ach*, why couldn't it have happened *after*, not *now!* We only had two days' verk left."

I wasn't there to express my personal opinion of any of them, and maybe I had no right to, but I couldn't hold it back. "You people," I let him know in a scathing undertone, "must have come up out of the bottom of the breadbox. I never saw such crumbs in my life, and I've sat out in front of many a line-up, believe me. *She's* thinking about the lines in her script, *you're* thinking about your picture. Well, there happens to be a poor miserable human being who, if she's conscious at all right now, is probably suffering the tortures of the damned. *I'm* thinking about her, Mr.

Big-Shot-Heinie-Director!"

He was stunned. Probably no one had ever spoken to him like that since he first arrived in the country. His mouth dropped open. "You talk to me?" he breathed.

"Yes, I talk to you!" I tapped my finger insultingly three times against his chest for emphasis. "Now you see that you talk back to me. I'm not on the studio payroll, I don't have to kowtow to you." I hadn't forgotten that it had been his doing that I'd been barred from the set in the first place.

Seeing that he wasn't up against one of his usual yes-men, he was suddenly meek as a lamb, only giving a look or two around to make sure no one was near enough to witness his submission. "What do you wish I say to you?"

"Here's what I'm asking you. Did you or did you not see what caused it?"

"No," he said, like a small kid answering the school truant officer.

"You didn't? Well, where were you when it started?"

"Right here in my chair. This same chair, where I am now. Looking right at her, watching her verk."

"And—"

"Suddenly begins flems. From nowhere, flems. One minute, is nothing. The next minute, flems." He gestured ripplingly.

"They don't begin from nowhere, they got to begin from somewhere. Did you know about her dress?"

A little of his former hauteur returned. "That is Wardrobe; that is not my department. I only create the picture, I do not dress it."

"Was anyone smoking a cigarette in here?"

"Abzolutely *not!*" he said emphatically. "I would not haf permit it. The lenses would pick up the haze, maybe. You haf to be careful of such things when you direct."

"Did she brush against any wire, maybe?"

"Where do you see any around? This is the inzide of an oldt-time house, you can see for yourself. Viers don't belong."

"What about this thing?" I picked up a lighted oil lamp that was standing on the fake window sill beside which she had been standing. Then I put it down again. It had an electric torch hidden in the base of it.

"Who was doing the scene with her? She wasn't alone in it, was she?"

"One other player. Ruth Tobias. That girl crying over there."

I let him go back to

his paper drinking-cups, and started over toward her.

She was having Academy-Award-winning hysterics across the back of a chair, and for a moment—for a moment only—as I stood looking down at her, I thought: "Someone with a heart at last."

She raised her head and looked at me, and, without knowing she was doing it, blew her chances for my sympathy. "Two whole years," she heaved with ricocheting breath. "Two whole years to make a comeback it's taken me—and now, this. And when you've been on the shelf for two years in this business, you're dead. Now I am finished, now I am through, now I may as well give up."

I felt like saying, "Your skin isn't burned off all over you, though, the way hers is," but I didn't. I said instead, "I want to ask you something. You were right there in the scene with her. Did *you* see what it was? Did *you* see what happened to her?"

She was an attractive woman; there were still telltale traces of it to be seen, under the make-up, the unflattering costuming and the alcohol puffiness. But it had taken a terrible beating, her attractiveness. Maybe during those two years.

She was gotten up to look old and severe; old-maidish. She was in black, and carried a lorgnette, and her hair was pulled back tight in a cranky knot.

"I played her older sister," she said, "and I was glad to take the part. I would have played her grandmother, if I'd had to. Why should I kid you? I begged them for it, I practically got down on my knees. I told them I knew the story backwards, and they finally gave it to me. It's a remake, you know."

I didn't. What's more, I didn't care.

"I had the lead in it, the first time around. Don't you remember? *Magnolias and Honeysuckle.* That's what this is."

I should remember picture titles.

"Don't you remember me?" she said then, wanly.

"They're not real, up there—" I started to say. Then I didn't go ahead. "To get back," I said pointedly.

She ran her hand in front of her eyes. "What was it you asked me?" she said with an effort.

"Did you see how it happened?"

"No. I was in that rocker

there on the set, facing her way—"

"And yet—"

"I wasn't *watching* for something to happen. How did I know something was going to happen? I didn't have any lines to cue to. My mind was a thousand miles away. All I kept thinking was, 'I won't have to stand behind any more counters in the dime store, I won't have to carry any more trays out to cars—' "

"Please, Miss Tobias." I said, almost embarrassed. "I don't want to know your personal thoughts. I only want to know what your eyes saw."

"I'm supposed not to approve of the fellow she's intending to run off with, but all I do to show it is to keep rocking back and forth, back and forth, through the whole scene. She had her back to me, over at the window. I was looking right at her—and all of a sudden, *ffft!* She was on fire from head to foot! As quickly as that, and for no earthly reason that I could make out. All I had time to do was jump back out of the way myself—"

"You would," I thought. "That's you."

"Was it unusually hot in here?" I asked. "Do you think that might have done it?"

"No, It's always warm under the lights, but it wasn't unusually so this time. Not hot enough for that. I know, because I'm very susceptible to heat, and I wasn't at all uncomfortable myself."

"Did you know about those hoop skirts? Is yours like that, too?"

She had to examine hers before she could give me the answer. "You mean that stiffening? Mine doesn't have any. Yes, I did hear vaguely something about that, but I didn't think twice about it. They left mine limp because there's a scene—not this one—in which I have to hold her in my arms, and they found it wasn't manageable with two hoop skirts; we couldn't get close enough to each other."

Just then word was brought in that, impossible as it sounded, the Meadows girl was still breathing. She was going fast, though, they said—just a matter of minutes now. They'd given her morphine to kill the pain.

"Is she conscious, or completely out?" I asked.

"Semiconscious. You know; sort of groggy from the hypo."

"Quick, then, let me see her a minute—"

"Oh, you can't question her

now," they protested, appalled.

"I won't subject her to questioning. Just take me to her a minute."

It was a slim chance, but maybe she, herself, knew what had caused it. She might have seen it happen, and not been able to prevent it in time. If I could only get her to whisper that to me—

It was a monstrous thing they showed me lying on a cot in a darkened room. Like a mummy, crisscrossed with yards and yards of gauze bandaging. No eyes, no ears, no nose, no anything. A crevice between the bandages for a mouth. Two bandaged paws atop the sheets. The faithful Nellie there on guard beside her.

I put my face down close. "Martha," I whispered. "Martha, can you hear me?" She moved a little, or I thought she did, which amounts to the same thing. "Martha," I begged again, "Martha Meadows, what caused the accident just now?"

I couldn't tell whether she'd heard me or not. There was no way. I repeated the question. Then suddenly I saw her head sway slowly from side to side, slowly and slightly. "No—accident," she mumbled. Then she muttered something else, but so low I couldn't catch it any more. A minute later her head had lolled loosely over to the side again and stayed that way. She was gone.

I went outside and stood there, lost in thought. I hadn't found out what I'd come to find out—what did it—but I'd found out something else much more important. "No—accident" meant it had been done purposely. What else could it mean? Or was I building myself a case out of thin air? Delirium, morphine—and a shaking of the head in her death throes that I'd mistaken for "no?" I tried to convince myself I was just looking for trouble. But it wouldn't work. I had an answer *pro* for every argument *con.* She'd known what I was asking her just now. She'd answered me with her voice, as well as with the motion of her head. She hadn't been out of her mind.

Death will strike during unconsciousness or sleep, maybe, but never during delirium. The mind will always clear just before it breaks up, even if only an instant before.

And hadn't she gotten threatening letters and asked for protection. Anyway, I told myself, as long as there *was* a doubt in my mind, it

was up to me to track it down until there *wasn't* any doubt left—either one way or the other. That was my job.

Nellie came out. She wasn't pleading any more like she had been on the set. There wasn't anything left to plead for now. She walked as though her legs were in plaster casts. She didn't see me. She didn't see anyone, I guess.

I didn't know what to call a middle-aged colored woman that would stop her most effectively. I didn't want to say, "Hey!" I didn't want to say, "You, there!" Finally I went after her and touched her arm. "Party," I said. "Like to talk to you a minute."

She stopped and turned and looked at me. She still didn't see me, I could tell, but she looked at me anyway. "If I am a party, I ain't a happy one. I'm a fun'ral party. Just call me Desolation and let me go my way."

"Won't keep you long."

"They musta been casting in heaven today, but they sure picked a miser'ble, low-down way to fill their star part," she said with a sort of suppressed rancor. "And what's she going to use for a maid on the set up there? Some skimpy angel that don't even know how to look after her nylons right?"

I wasn't sure if this was her own native poetry or if she'd been listening to actors say their lines around her too long.

"I'm gonna buy me a bottle of gin," she said, "and keep on drinking it down till I can see the clear sky through the bottom. And another, if I have to. And another. Till I can't remember her no more. And till I can't remember me, either. And that's about all the good life is: a bottle of gin and don't remember yourself."

"You sure loved her all right," I said.

"No, I didn't love her," she said with abrasive scorn. Then she said, "It's funny, but I only loved two people in my whole life. My mother, and this little white girl. One of them taught me never to drink. Now the other one's goin' teach me never to stop."

Then she seemed to remember that I was someone, and that I'd stopped her and was standing there. "Whutchu want with me?" she asked with sudden sharpness, and an access of inflection that hadn't been present before.

"I just want to ask a question or two."

"Who you to ask ques-

tions?" she said challengingly.

"I'm a policeman," I said. "We have to, sometimes."

"Police-man," she said accusingly. "Police-man." She broke the word in two. "Police-maan." She bleated it like a goat. "You going to bring her back? You going to make her eyes open, and her mouth speak, and her pretty face whole again? No, you going to ask questions! Well, doan ask 'em round hea', policeman. Ask 'em where they can be answered. Ask *God* why He took her in such a—"

"Sh-h-h!" I cautioned her primly.

I gave her a minute to quiet down.

"Are you listening?" I tried again when the minute was up. "You don't happen to know of anyone who had a grudge against her, do you?"

She tossed her head impatiently. "Your foolish mouth! She was everybody's honey. She made it Christmas every day of the year, everywhere she went. Didn't she even go to the trouble of asking 'em and coaxing 'em to give that Miss Tobias a job in her picture, for old times' sake, when nobody wanted her any more? Everybody loved Miss Martha!"

"Not really," I said. "Everybody doesn't love *any*body. If you get me. Lots may, or some may. Not everybody all at once. That's out of this world. Then how about those threats she got? Were they from someone who loved her, too?"

"Some crank," she said disdainfully. "They weren't anything. Everybody in the business gets 'em one time or another. It means you're a big shot, that's all."

"You were in there with her when it happened. What'd *you* see?"

"There was nothing *to* see. I took my eyes off her for a minute; nex' minute she wasn't there any more, only fire—with her voice in the middle of it, screaming. That's how fast it seemed like."

I slapped my hand frustratedly against the side of my thigh.

"Can I go now?" she chafed rebelliously. "I've got a date with a package store."

She turned and went, without waiting for my dismissal. I wouldn't have stopped her anyway. "Take it easy on the gin stuff," I advised her. "That won't bring her back."

"No," she answered mournfully, without turning her head, "but it'll make her go

'way altogether; and that's even better!"

I rang headquarters and gave the chief a full account of what had happened, up to this point. "Something new—an invisible accident. Right under everybody's nose, and yet nobody saw it."

"You'll have to stay on it by yourself, at least for the next couple of hours. I can't send anyone else over before then. There's been a big armed hold-up at one of the downtown stores, and I'm short of men. I'll let the studio brass know you're in charge."

When I got back to the set, they were all there yet—all except Stormann and Ruth Tobias, that is. "I thought I told you," I muttered accusingly to the guard, "to keep your eye on everybody, see that they all stayed here."

"I couldn't stop them," he whined. "I tried, but they didn't pay any attention. I'm only a guard here, and it woulda cost me my job. Besides, they'll be right back, they told me so. Stormy only stepped out a minute to get some more liquor. The electrician that was supplying him ran out of it. And Miss Tobias went to take off her costume. She got jittery because Stormy was nervous and started smoking around her. After what happened to—"

But hers hadn't had the lethal celluloid stiffening under it. So why did she bother to change it?

I checked with the electrician distiller who'd been supplying Stormann. "Why, no," he said flatly. "I've got some left. I told him so, only he got a sudden notion he wanted better quality liquor than I had, and went out after it."

They were both back in no time at all, and at that, Tobias was back first of the two. I made a mental note of that, wondering: Should it take a man longer to obtain some liquor than it does a woman. and a conceited woman, an actress to boot, to change clothes from head to foot?

She looked better now. She's loosened her hair, and it hung down free. But this wasn't a beauty contest I was holding here.

Stormann already had an uncertain shuffling gait. Proving, if anything, only that he wasn't used to much alcohol. He came up to me and breathed fearfully: "How is she?"

"Dead," I said, for the shock value.

It sure had plenty. He

folded up and went down right in front of me. They picked him up and carried him out. I went with them part of the way. Only long enough to finger my lapel, extract a pin from it and sheath it in the back of his hand. He never even twitched. So I withdrew the pin, replaced it in my lapel, turned around and came back. Nothing like being certain in your own mind about a thing, any thing at all. He *had* passed out.

It being my first time in sole charge of a case, I played it up big. I turned a chair around backwards, sat down on it, and faced the remaining members of the group. I gave them a short speech. Short, but a speech nevertheless. Ending up: "—and all I'm going to do, for the present, is repeat the question I've already asked Mr. Stormann, Miss Tobias, Nellie and this young lady over here, the script girl. Did any of you see what caused it?"

Electricians, stage hands and camera crew all shook their heads.

I got up and banged the chair down hard for emphasis. "She wasn't six feet away from some of you!" I bawled them out. "She was in the full glare of some of the brightest lights ever devised! All eyes were on her at the time, watching every move she made! And yet nobody saw how it started! Two dozen pairs of eyes, and they might as well have all been closed! Well, there's one pair left—and maybe I'll have better luck with them."

I suppose they thought I meant my own. I didn't.

"Now clear out of here, all of you, and give me your names and addresses as you go. You're subject to recall for further questioning. You stay—" This was to the chief electrician, "and check up on those lights of yours for defects—one of them might have got overheated and dropped a spark on her. You take this—" I passed my handkerchief to the guard, "and go over the floor, especially over there around where she was first standing and pick up everything that doesn't belong, no matter what. Every cigarette butt and every cinder.

The rest of them filed out past me one by one, giving their names and addresses as they went. They all reacted differently. Well, I guess that many different people always do and always will. Some were a little nervous, some indifferent, some wisecracked. One grip, a man a little older than the rest, with

graying hair, said to me: "This is your first case, isn't it?"

"I'll ask the questions here," I said noncommittally.

But he compressed the five words into just one, "Yes," and took that for the answer. "I could tell. You got so angry about it."

"Next," I said.

The script girl played a script girl to the bitter end: nose actually still buried in her book as she came sauntering on.

"They're not going to make that picture any more."

"I know, but it seems a shame not to memorize it to the end. I have only two more pages to go. I like to finish anything I begin."

Ambition, I felt like saying, will get you nowhere.

And Tobias came last. There was a little defiant springiness to her step, I thought. Or maybe she always walked that way, how should I know? "Ruth Helen Tobias. Such-and-such Santa Monica Boulevard."

She had hazel eyes, I saw, as she gave her name. I looked down at my writing.

"This was a day," she said.

That didn't need an answer. Then she said, "I feel as if I'd lost a sister. We were both the same age, you know."

"Thirtieth of next February," I thought. I just minded my business, so she gave up and went on her way. After she was gone, then I did look up. "Any man, just so she can feel young again for a few minutes," I thought. "Even a freshman detective. It must be terrible to be a woman and care how you look."

The chief cameraman came out of his booth with a round, flat, tin box packed under his arm.

"Where you going with that?" I asked him.

"Drop it in the ashcan on my way out," he said. "It's what we took today; no good now any more."

"Ashcan, hell," I let him know. "You hang onto that, but tight. That's what I want. Those lenses of yours are the other pair of eyes I told them about. How soon can you develop that stuff?"

"Why, right away," he told me, looking surprised. "But are you sure you— This has her whole death scene on it."

"And that's just what I want. Don't touch it, leave it just the way it is. Can I trust you?"

"I'll meet you in Projection Room A as soon as I've finished it," he said quietly. "She was a swell kid."

The electrician came down from way up high somewhere and reported the lights and wiring all in order. Not a loose wire, not a screw out of place anywhere.

"You dig up a typewriter, get that all down on paper and sign it," I instructed him. "Then shoot it in to me at Headquarters." I wasn't sure just what good that was, but it sounded nice and official.

The guard passed my handkerchief back to me with a cigarette butt, a wire frame and a lot of little pieces of glass in it.

"The butt's Stormann's," he pointed out. "He was smoking it after it was all over. I saw him throw it down and step on it before he went out after that liquor. That was when Tobias yapped, 'Don't come near me with that thing! You want it to happen to me, too?' "

I wondered if that remark meant anything. Did he *want* it to happen to her, too? As if to say, he'd wanted it to happen to Meadows, in the first place. I decided that was stretching it too far; it was just a turn of speech, with no ulterior meaning. I knew what the pieces of glass and the frame were: a shattered lorgnette like the one I had seen Tobias fiddling with.

"Meadows had it around her neck, I guess," he suggested, "and it fell and smashed when she started to run around crazy."

That I disagreed with, but I didn't tell him so. These pieces of glass were clear; the burning celluoid would have smoked them up if they had been on Martha Meadows' person.

I sent for the wardrobe woman and had her bring a complete list of every article she had furnished Meadows and Tobias for this picture. I singled out just the two of them, because there hadn't been any other women in this particular scene with them.

She was an aristocratic-looking person with white hair—a former actress herself, I imagined, judging by the way she was groomed. She had typewritten sheets with her.

"Did you supply Meadows with a lorgnette?"

"Why, no. Young girls didn't carry them, even in those days."

"You did supply Tobias with one?"

"Yes." She showed it to me on the inventory.

I showed her the pieces. "Is this it?"

"It must be. She turned in her costume a little while ago and explained that she'd broken hers while that awful thing was happening to poor Martha. You see, I have everything else crossed off but that. Ordinarily we charge players for anything that isn't returned to us, but in this case I don't suppose that will be done."

It seemed to me I had seen the lorgnette on Tobias *after* the accident, but I couldn't be sure enough on that point this long after to make too much out of that.

A kid came in and said: "The rushes are ready for you in Projection Room A," and took me over there.

The room had rows of seats just like a miniature theatre, and a screen on one wall. I closed the door and locked the projectionist and myself in.

"You'd better hang on tight," he warned. "This is ghastly."

"If you can stand it," I told him, "I can. Run it through at normal speed first."

I sat down in the front row with the screen almost on top of me. There wasn't much to it at regular speed —maybe about five-minutes' worth of picture, a single sequence. But it was so grisly, it was almost too long at that. It opened on Tobias sitting there in the rocker, broadside to the camera. Meadows came in almost at once.

"I'm going away with him tonight," she said.

Tobias raised her lorgnette and looked at her disapprovingly through it. Meadows went over to the window, and the camera followed her part of the way. "Dollied" after her, I think they call it. That left Tobias over at the left-hand side of the screen and partly out of the picture, with just one shoulder, arm, and the side of her head showing. She started to rock back and forth and tap her lorgnette against the back of her hand. I had my eyes glued to Meadows, though. She turned around to look at her "sister."

"Oh, won't he ever come?" she said.

Her face sort of tightened up—changed from repose to tenseness. A look of horror started to form on it, but it never got any further. Right then and there the thing happened.

The best way I can describe it is that a sort of bright, luminous flower seemed to open up halfway down her dress, spreading, peeling back. But the petals of it

were flame. An instant later it was all over her, and the first screams of a voice that was gone now came smashing out at my eardrums. And in-between screams, the hellishly conscientious soundtrack had even picked up and recorded the sizzling that her hair made. Like eggs frying in a pan.

"Cut!" I turned round and yelled back at him. "For Pete's sake, cut." And I mopped my drenched forehead.

"I felt the same way myself while I was processing it," he confessed, looking out of the projection booth at me.

It hadn't told me a thing so far. But then I hadn't expected it to, the first throw out of the bag.

"Go back and start it over," I shivered. "But whatever you do, leave out that finale. Take it up where she turns at the window. Slow motion this time. Can you hold it when I tell you to?"

He adjusted his apparatus. "Sure. Just say when," he called.

The figures on the screen hardly moved at all on this run; eight times slowed down. They drifted lazily—sort of floated. I knew the place to look for on Meadows' dress now, and I kept my eyes focused on it and let everything else ride. A moment later something had shown up there.

"Hold it!" I yelled, and the scene obediently froze into a "still."

Now it was just a magic-lantern slide, no motion at all. I left my seat and stood close up against the screen, keeping to one side so my own shadow wouldn't blur out that place on her dress. No flame was coming from it yet. It was just a bright, luminous spot, about the size and shape of a dime.

"Back up one!" I instructed him. By "one" I meant a single "frame" or still picture. As most of us know, without having to be technically proficient in cinematography, any strip of "motion" picture film consists of an endless number of little still pictures in succession, which hardly vary one from the next. They carry the thread of motion along, by infinitesimal alteration. It takes about eight hundred of them, speaking loosely, to show a guy raising a cigarette to his mouth.

At any rate, whatever the correct jargon to be used in such an instance, he seemed to understand what I wanted without any difficulty, and carried it out. The scene hardly shifted at all; there

was just a momentary blurring of lines, but when they'd settled again, the pinpoint of light was smaller—like a pea now. You couldn't have seen it at all from the seat I'd been in at first.

Two heads are better than one. I called him out and showed it to him with a pencil. "What do you make of this?"

"It's a blob of light coming to a head at that place on her dress. Like a highlight, you might say. A gleam, originating from somewhere else."

Which was just exactly what I'd had it figured for, myself.

"Go three frames forward," I said, "and then hold it."

He came out again to look. It was back to the size of a dime once more, and only a frame or two before the flames were due to show up.

"There's heat in it!" I said, "See that!"

The white spot had developed a dark core, a pinhead of black or brown.

"That's the material of the dress getting ready to burn. See that thread coming out of the dot? Smoke—and all there'll ever be of it, too. Celluloid doesn't give much warning."

So far so good. But what I wanted to know was where that gleam or ray was coming from. I had the effect now, but I wanted the cause. The trouble was, you couldn't follow the beam through the air—to gauge its direction. Like any beam of light, it left no trail—only showed up suddenly on her dress. Maybe one of the powerful Klieg lights, high overhead and out of the picture, had developed some flaw in its glass shield, warping one of its rays. But the chief electrician had gone over them afterward and given them all a clean bill of health.

"Start it up again," I said wearily. "Slow motion," and went back and sat down. I was further away now and had a better perspective of the thing as a whole; maybe that was what did it.

As the scene on the screen thawed and slowly dissolved into fluid motion once more, it gave the impression for a moment of everything on it moving at once. Therefore it was only natural that the one thing that *didn't* move should catch my eye and hold it.

Tobias' lorgnette, and the wrist and hand that held it.

The three objects stayed rigid, down in the lower left-hand corner of the screen, after everything else was on the go once more. The chair

she was in had started to rock slowly back and forth, and her body with it, but the forearm, wrist, hand and lorgnette stayed poised, motionless. There was something unnatural about it that caught the eye at once. I remembered she had opened the scene by tapping her lorgnette *as well as* rocking.

Now, with the fire due to break out any second, she was only rocking. The lorgnette was stiff as a ramrod in her grasp. Not that she was holding it out at full length before her or anything like that; she was holding it close in, unobtrusively, but straight up and down—a little out to one side of her own body. Maybe the director's orders had been for her to stop fiddling with it at a certain point. Then again maybe not. All I wanted to find out was at what point she had stopped tapping and playing with it. I had been concentrating on Meadows until now and had missed that.

"Whoa, back up!" I called out to him. "All the way back and then start over—slow."

I let Meadows go this time and kept my eye on Tobias and her lorgnette. The minute I saw it stop—"Hold it!" I yelled, and ran over to the screen and examined Meadows' dress. Nothing yet. But in three more "frames" that deadly white spot had already showed up on the celluloid-lined hoopskirt. Effect had followed cause too quickly to be disregarded.

"Lights!" I roared. "I've got it!"

He turned a switch, the room blazed all around me, and I took that handherchief out of my pocket and examined the pieces of glass it held. Some were thicker than others—the lens had therefore probably been convex, not flat. I held one up and looked at my cuff through it. The weave stood out. A magnifying glass. I held it about a foot away from the back of my hand, where I'd already been burned once that afternoon, and even with the far weaker lights of the projection room working through it, in about thirty seconds something bit me and I jumped.

He'd come out and was watching what I was doing.

"Pack that film up again in the box the way you had it," I said. "I'll be back for it in a minute. I have to see someone first. Then I'm taking it down to Headquarters with me."

I went over and knocked on the door of the dressing

room where they' d told me I'd find Ruth Tobias. "Miss Tobias, would you come out here a minute," I said in that flat voice you use when you're going to make a pinch. "I want to talk to you."

She opened the door, and again my impression was, as it had been once before, that her eyes were hazel. Eyes are big when they're trying to flirt; they're also big when they're frightened.

"What're the charges?" the chief asked when I brought her in with me.

"Causing Martha Meadows' death by setting fire to an inflammable costume she had on, by focusing the strong Klieg lights through a magnifying glass, while they were working together in a scene. Here's the glass she used to do it, picked up on the set. Here's the original harmless glass that was in the frame before she knocked it out, picked up in the trash basket in her dressing room. The film, there in that box, shows her in the act of doing it. She's been eaten away with jealousy and hate ever since she faded out and Martha Meadows replaced her. And then what brought matters to a head, I think, was that they decided to remake the very picture that had been her own greatest success, with Meadows in the part she'd originally had, and with she herself playing an older, unsympathetic part."

"You fool!" she hissed in my direction, after she'd been booked and the matron was leading her away. "You fool trying to play the part of a detective—" And being an actress, she could make her lines sound good, even at such a time and in such a place. "You'll never make this stick. You think you've got a case against me, but you'll find out different!" And then, just to give it the final dramatic flourish, I suppose, she spat on the Headquarters building floor.

The chief smiled, and I bristled. I'm still touchy about our prestige.

"She's right in a way, Gal," he commented, after the noise had died down. "We can prove that she was the cause of it happening, in such and such a way, but I doubt very much, even with that film you've got there, that we can prove it was *intentional*, that it was done *purposely*."

"She may be able to get around that," I said, "but I have a hunch she won't get around this so easy." I took out an oblong of blotting paper torn into four pieces and

passed them to him. "This, too, was in the trashbasket in her dressing room. Since when do people take the trouble to *tear up* a blotter? Isn't it enough just to throw it away whole, once it's become unusable? If they do tear it up, isn't that an indication there's something on it they want to conceal, to do away with? In other words, a sign of guilt? To me it is."

"And?" he queried.

"I matched the pieces together, in reverse against the dressing-room mirror—you know that old trick. Just one line escaped the general blur of ink pressings. The user had blotted it too close to a blank margin. '-never live to finish this picture-.' If that shows up on any of those threatening letters you're holding—"

"You put in quite an afternoon," was his way of patting me on the back. At least, I suppose it was that.

"And now," he added, "I suppose on your next night off you'll go and sit in some movie show with your missus, and take up disliking all of them again where you left off."

"It'll be a long time before you ever catch me at a movie show again," I let him know with intensity. "I couldn't, not me! No matter what the picture was, she'd be up there in the middle of it, burning like a bonfire, screaming her life away—for the help that never came."

"And *you're* the fellow who used to say," he reminded me, but rather gently. " 'They're not real up there, just photographs moving around on celluloid.' "

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